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PSALM LI.



3089.c31.



PSALM LI.

A COURSE OF

Seven Lenten Sermons.

BY

WILLIAM WALSHAM HOW, M.A.,

Rector of Whittington, Shropshire, Rural Dean.

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W. WELLS GARDNER, 10, PATERNOSTER ROW;

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1.

INTRODUCTORY.

Psalm li. 1. (Prayer-book version.)

**“Have mercy upon me, O God, after
“Thy great goodness: according to the
“multitude of Thy mercies do away
“mine offences.”**

FOR nearly three thousand years has the Book of Psalms been the handbook of devotion for all true worshippers of God. Think how great a “cloud of “witnesses” have proved the blessedness of this most precious book. Think how vast a multitude of those, who in olden times have “died in faith,” have winged their prayers and praises upward to God’s throne upon the living words of the “sweet Psalmist of Israel.” And verily “he, being dead, yet speaketh.” For are not his words even now

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the daily utterance of thousands and tens of thousands of our brethren in Christ? What trembling sinner has not fitted his lowly confession to the thrilling accents of David's penitence? What holy saint has not poured out his thankful heart in the jubilant outbursts of David's praise? Perhaps not a single minute passes by, that does not carry with it to the ear of God some verse of this priceless Book of Psalms. O brethren, do we care to "agree on earth" with all God's holy ones as touching what we would ask of the Father? Do we care to own our oneness and our brotherhood with the children of our common Father? Do we care to claim our place and share in the blessed "communion of "saints," and to be numbered, even now, with the "spirits of just men "made perfect,"—to walk as *they*

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walked, to pray as *they* prayed, to draw nigh to God as *they* drew nigh? Then, how good a thing is it to take into our mouths, and to utter from our hearts, the very words with which the Holy Spirit taught the fathers of old, and teaches all true believers still, to come unto the throne of grace. And yet is it not true that in these days numbers think a great deal more of weak modern shallow compositions of man than of these words of the Spirit of God, and would rather join some small sect in singing a popular hymn, than chant the Psalms of David with the whole Church of the living God?

And do we ask for farther proof of the value of the Book of Psalms? Let us ask what "hymn" was that which was sung on that solemn night in the "upper room" at Jerusalem? We can hardly doubt that it was

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one of the Psalms of David.* Or again, let us stand by the cross of Jesus; let us listen to the precious words which fall from those dying lips: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Ah! brethren, even He—our Redeemer, our Pattern, our King, our God,—even He loved and used the old familiar words. Listen once again. The end is come. "Into Thy hands I commend My spirit." Yea, and with the words of a Psalm does His very spirit go forth unto the Father. Shall our Lord Himself thus make the Psalms His own, and shall they be strange to His servants' lips?

To the Jews under the law the

* Psalms cxiii. to cxviii. were looked upon by the Jews as one great psalm of praise, and were specially appropriated to the season of the Passover, the former part (to the end of cxv.) being sung before the Paschal Feast, and the latter part after it.

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Psalms were full of mystery. They could not discern their inner spiritual meaning. And yet, even to them, how blessed was their use. ‘They saw in the Psalms God’s mighty and wonderful works; and they praised Him. They heard of His mercy and goodness towards His chosen people; and they were thankful. They read His warnings against rebellion and idolatry; and they were watchful. They found in them a promise of One to come who should suffer for them, and redeem them, and reign over them; and they waited. They learned blessed lessons of God’s nearness to them, of His present help and His protecting power; and they trusted in Him. They sang of the pleasures at His right hand, and the glories of His dwelling-place; and they loved and

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‘hoped. But, if the Psalms spake so much to the Jew, who read the letter only, what should they speak to the Christian, who reads the spirit? He knows that they speak, not of David, and of the Israelites, but of Christ and of His people,—of His and their enemies,—of His and their dangers,—of His and their trials and temptations,—of His and their sorrows,—of His and their triumphs,—of His and their eternal glory.’* A ray of living light streams back upon them from the cross of Christ, and lights up all the hidden gems scattered through their sacred pages. Even of old they welled up with fresh waters of life: but Christ hath turned the water into wine, even “wine that maketh glad the heart of man.” And thus are the Psalms

* From the Bishop of Brechin on the Penitential Psalms.

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very precious to the Christian. He finds in them a voice for the utterance of all his soul's needs. Whether he be in sorrow or in joy, in sickness or in health, yea, in whatsoever state he be, he finds words that fit his heart's desires. He finds that those were true words which an ancient writer* wrote, "In the Book of Psalms there is benefit for all, and a medicine for the health of man. Every one who reads them can find therein the proper cure for his own wounds."

Well, then, my friends, let us ask, How do *we* read the Psalms? Do we find them such as holy men have ever found them? Are they a mouth-piece for our hearts? A portion of them is read or sung whenever we meet in the House of God. And mark how fitly the Psalms bear their

* St. Ambrose, in the 4th century A.D.

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place in our services. Have you ever observed the wise and instructive order of the different parts of our public worship? There is, first, confession of sin; and rightly first. For shall not the erring child first seek pardon from his offended Father before asking for new favours? But after confessing our sins, and hearing God's gracious assurance of pardon, we then can pour out our hearts in "the spirit of adoption," and, as reconciled and forgiven children, cry "Our Father," laying all our wants before His mercy-seat in the words of His own beloved Son. And now what shall be our next act of worship? Is it time to ask for all things needful as well for our bodies as our souls? Is it time to plead for our brethren, to remember in our prayers all for whom we are bound to pray? Nay, is there not

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one act of worship which should come even before these? With sins confessed and pardon assured, what else would we do but lift up our hearts and our voices in praise and adoration to our gracious and merciful Father? And so our Church would lead us. The first portion of our public worship we may call the service of Confession. The second portion we may call the service of Praise.* And here it is that the Psalms of David become so fitting a voice for the utterance of our hearts. For think what they are. They are the words, not of man, but of the Spirit of God.

* Basil, in the 4th century, describing Christian worship, says that the people in his time, "rising before it was light, went to the house of prayer, and there, in great agony of soul, and incessant showers of tears, made confession of their sins to God; and then, rising from their prayers, proceeded to singing of psalms, dividing themselves into two parts, and singing by turns."

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Our Lord says, David “spake by “the Holy Ghost.” St. Peter, before the election of Matthias, says, “The “Holy Ghost by the mouth of David “spake before concerning Judas.” Can, then, any mere human words equal these? Again I ask, How do *we* use these Divine words? We have listened to our appointed portion of these words but now. Had we ears to hear? Did they speak to us? Nay, rather, did they speak *for* us? That is, did they speak the thoughts, the feelings, the wishes, of our hearts? Did our hearts go with the words? When we rose up to praise God in the Psalms, did our souls rise with our bodies? Oh! remember, Praise is the noblest work which man can do. Nay, is it not angel’s work? Did we, then, take our share in that heavenly work this day? Or were our hearts astray,

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our voices mute, our souls grovelling here below, when we ought to have been mingling our praises, faint and feeble though they be, with the everlasting songs of the heavenly choirs? Oh! God forgive our cold dull hearts, and teach us to praise Him better!

Now you will have noticed that I took my text from the Prayer-book version of the Psalms. And some of you may like to know the reason of the difference between that and the Bible version. The fact is, the Prayer-book version is much the older of the two, being taken from the translation of the Bible which was in use at the time when our Prayer-book was drawn up. And when another translation of the Bible was made, it was not thought well to change the Psalms in the Prayer-book, because the people were so familiar

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with the older version that the change would have been unpleasant to them, while the alterations in the meaning, made in the new translation, were of no great importance. If this was the true reason for the retaining of the old version, I fear it could hardly be given now. I fear a love of the Psalms has much lessened amongst us. I am sure a great many listen eagerly to sermons, who do not care at all for the words of the Psalms. And I am sure, too, that the good old custom of reading the daily portion of the Psalms at home, which has been the stay and comfort of many a sick and aged Christian, is fast dying away.

I am inclined to think that delight in the use of the Psalms is a very fair proof and test of the state of our spiritual life. I believe it to be a good sign of a pure heart and a healthful

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mind. The Psalms are, in this respect, like hymns. As children we delight in hymns. In youth they too often seem to us childish. But as the heart and mind advance in true education; as the world loses something of its first deceitful brightness, and simple-minded single-hearted religion is restored to its proper place; as we begin to judge less as the world around us judges, and more as our best feelings and God's grace would lead us to judge; in short, as the character becomes less worldly, and more true and pure and earnest, in the same degree do we generally regain the power of delighting in psalms and hymns. Is it not in truth a part and sign of that *childlike* state, which the Saviour spoke of, when He bade us "become as little children"? Nay, if we doubt the fitness of the Psalms as a natural expression of the

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Christian's feelings, let us listen to an Apostle's witness:—"Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him *sing psalms*." I know a great many cannot feel this. I believe to almost all some verses in the Psalms will seem too high and heavenly,—beyond what they can feel or understand. O Christian brethren, is it not a sad thing that our spiritual feelings should be so far below what David's were? He was a Jew; we are Christians. And yet the words of the Jewish king glow with a fervent love and intense devotion, to which our cold weak hearts are too much strangers. It is because we cannot feel as David felt that we do not love his words better. It is because our faith and love are so poor compared with his, that we do not oftener pour out our hearts by *singing*

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psalms. If *we* had David's faith, how would his words come home to our hearts, when he sings, "The Lord is
"my strong rock and my defence,
"my Saviour, my God, and my might,
"in whom I will trust, my buckler,
"the horn also of my salvation, and
"my refuge." Or, again, "I have set
"God always before me: for He is
"on my right hand, therefore I shall
"not fall." If *we* had David's love to God, and longing desire after Him,—if our affections were set, as his were, on things above,—then should we love to utter his words of holy longing, and to say with him, "Like
"as the hart desireth the water-brooks,
"so longeth my soul after Thee, O
"God. My soul is athirst for God,
"yea, even for the living God: when
"shall I come to appear before the
"presence of God?" If *we* had

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David's full and sure belief in God's wisdom and love, we should see His wise and loving hand in all His dealings with us: especially when sorrow and trouble come upon us, and we are in heaviness through manifold trials, then should we look up to our Father in heaven, and cry, "I know that Thou "of very faithfulness hast caused me "to be troubled." Again, if *we* had David's confidence in God's promises, if *we* gave as simple and undoubting an assent to God's gracious words as David did, how different a thing would prayer, and confession of sin, and every other act of worship, become to us. David wrote, "I said I will "confess my sins unto the Lord: and "so Thou forgavest the wickedness "of my sin." And David wrote this, because he believed it; because he was sure that God had done what He had

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said He would do. *We* confess our sins unto the Lord; but we will not believe that our sins are forgiven. Yet God has said it. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." Yes, but we only half believe it. Yet, once more, if *we* had David's penitence, if we sorrowed for our sins as he sorrowed for his, and hated them as he hated his, oh! how would the thrilling words of his psalms of penitence pierce our very souls, and supply the present want of our broken and contrite hearts, by giving a voice to our sorrow, and speech to our hidden mourning! David poured forth his bitter cries of confession and his earnest pleadings for mercy out of the abundance of his heart. And many a sin-stricken conscience has made David's cries and David's pleadings its own. Perhaps

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the grief and contrition and penitence are filling the soul like a pent-up flood of waters, seeking a channel for their utterance. The voice is silent with fear and great awe. Words come not at the bidding of the downcast spirit. But here a channel is found. David was a man as we are. David's heart beat as ours beat. Aye, and David poured forth the sorrows of his heart as we would pour forth ours. Oh! how thankfully, then, may the penitent make David's penitence his own!

But of all the penitential Psalms of David, none is so deep and full and perfect an expression of the sinner's cry for mercy and pardon as the 51st. Mark the occasion of it. It was uttered, as the heading of the Psalm in the Bible tells you, after King David's sad fall, and when the prophet Nathan had been sent to reprove him. You will

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remember the history. It is briefly this. David had yielded to temptation, and fallen into very grievous and deadly sin ; and, as usual, one sin had led to another, even till he had crowned his course of guilt with actual murder, having procured the death of Uriah in order that he might be free to marry his wife Bathsheba. It seems that all through this course of deadly wickedness the king must have silenced and drowned his conscience, as sinners very often do for a time. But God was merciful to him, and sent Nathan the prophet to him for the very purpose of awakening his slumbering conscience, and teaching him his guilt. This the prophet did by means of a parable. He told the king that “there were two
“men in one city, the one rich and the
“other poor. The rich man had ex-
“ceeding many flocks and herds. But

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“the poor man had nothing, save one
“little ewe lamb, which he had bought
“and nourished up: and it grew up
“together with him and with his
“children; it did eat of his own meat,
“and drank of his own cup, and lay
“in his bosom, and was unto him as a
“daughter. And there came a tra-
“veller unto the rich man, and he
“spared to take of his own flock
“and of his own herd, to dress for
“the wayfaring man that was come
“unto him; but took the poor man’s
“lamb, and dressed it for the man that
“was come to him.” No wonder
“David’s anger was greatly kindled
“against the man,” so that “he said
“unto Nathan, The man that hath
“done this thing shall surely die.”
Oh! surely the heart is “deceitful above
“all things.” How plain a picture is
here drawn of David’s own sin. Yet

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he knows it not. And so it ever is. What man knows himself? Especially, what sinful man knows the likeness of his own sin? Ah! if we could only see ourselves sometimes as others see us; if we could only for one instant see ourselves as God sees us, and as others would see us, if they could read every thought and motive of the secret heart, how well would it be for us! If some Nathan could but come to us and picture us to ourselves in a parable, so that we could pass judgment on ourselves as on some unknown person, how might it waken our easy self-satisfied consciences, and bring us to true repentance. But Nathan has to interpret his own parable, plain as it is. And how startling must it have been to the guilty, but still impenitent, king to hear his righteous judgment turned upon himself, as Nathan answers,

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“Thou art the man.” Then came the rush of self-condemnation. Then the guilty conscience arose and spake aloud. Then the sin stood out in all its hateful foulness. Then all mean and paltry excuses suddenly dropped away, and the man met his crime face to face, with no veil between. He could brave it out no longer. His sin had found him out. And, humbled, and broken in heart, “David said “unto Nathan, I have sinned against “the Lord.” Well for him that he could thus say. For the Lord is “gracious and merciful, slow to anger, “and of great kindness, and repenteth “Him of the evil.” “And Nathan “said unto David, The Lord also hath “put away thy sin ; thou shalt not die.” O brother sinners, how comforting an end to how sad a story ! Well may David sing, “There is mercy with

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“Thee : therefore shalt Thou be feared.”
Yea, there is mercy with God such as sinners very often will neither believe nor understand,—full, free, abounding, mercy; the mercy which Christ came to teach to the world. And now we can understand better the bitter cry of sorrow, and the eager pleading for pardon and cleansing, which we find in the 51st Psalm. It was composed when David awoke to the consciousness of his great and deadly sin at the reproof of God’s messenger. It is the first outpouring of the broken and contrite heart; the first utterance of the sin-stricken penitent soul.

And how well and wisely, then, is this Psalm put into our mouths by our Church on Ash Wednesday, in the heart-stirring penitential service framed for that day. On Ash Wednesday,

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the first of the forty days of Lent, we are called to special remembrance, and special confession, of our sins. Could we then have words more fitted to our needs than those in which David lays *his* sins before the throne of mercy, and confesses their great guilt? Nay, I think that he who can hear those words spoken by a whole congregation on their knees before God, and can remain unmoved, must be very ignorant of his own sinfulness and need of repentance. I trust I am speaking now to some at least who know these things; who feel and own they are grievous sinners; who long to repent; who long to tell God of their sin and unworthiness, and to throw themselves on His boundless mercy. O ye who mourn for your sins; ye who have fallen, I care not how greatly fallen, and long, yet fear, to arise; ye whose sins have

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taken such hold upon you that ye cannot look up, listen to David's voice of lowly penitence; learn to join your voice, however feebly, with his; learn to pour forth your grief and shame and humble supplications with his; and, like him, you too shall find pardon and mercy and salvation through Jesus Christ.

2.

Psalm li. 1—4. (Prayer-book version.)

**“Have mercy upon me, O God, after
“Thy great goodness: according to the
“multitude of Thy mercies do away
“mine offences.**

**“Wash me thoroughly from my
“wickedness: and cleanse me from
“my sin.**

**“For I acknowledge my faults: and
“my sin is ever before me.**

**“Against Thee only have I sinned,
“and done this evil in Thy sight: that
“Thou mightest be justified in Thy
“saying, and clear when Thou art
“judged.”**

WE now come to consider the separate verses of this most touching and beautiful Psalm. I trust we are not approaching its sacred words without having in our secret hearts asked God to send us the help of His Holy Spirit that those words may be greatly

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blest to us, and that, through their power, we may be able both to embrace and ever to hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life. The words we are going to consider are the words of true penitence. And true penitence wins pardon. And pardon is the pledge of salvation. Let us make the words our own, and the penitence our own. And then the pardon and salvation will be our own too.

The sin-stricken soul is drawing nigh to the offended God. Conscience has spoken. The sin has found out the sinner. He feels the all-seeing Eye upon him. He cannot hide from it. He cannot shut it out. It is gazing ever down into the lowest depth of his polluted heart. For a long time he has shut his eyes and turned away. He can do so no more now. God's Spirit has opened his eyes. He *must* see.

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See what? See his own foul and miserable self. And nothing else? Yea, see also that which makes self look so foul and miserable; see that eye—the eye of a pure and just and holy God—shining, like a piercing star, down into his soul. And he has no power any more to turn away from that dreadful haunting vision. He has met himself face to face. Aye, and he has met his God face to face too. The Lord hath a controversy with him. He must stand and answer for himself. Well for him that he may do so *now*. It might have been left till the day of judgment. What can he answer? What can he do? What can he say? He does the only thing he can do, or dare do. He falls on his face before the awful majesty of the God he has sinned against, and cries, “Have mercy.”

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“Have mercy.” Yes, here is the one great, all-absorbing, need of the sinner.

“Mercy, good Lord, mercy I ask ;
“This is the total sum.”

And in this very word—in this very cry—the helpless, perhaps almost hopeless, cry of the shrinking sinner, who scarcely dare even fall down in speechless agony before a righteous God, yet, almost as an instinct, breathes out the one word “Mercy,”—in this very word falls on his soul the first drop of balm, shines into his heart the first soft ray of distant hope. For why should he say ‘Mercy,’ if he does not know that God is merciful? Why should he ask such a boon, if he has no remembrance of the truth that “the Lord is gracious “and merciful, slow to anger, and of “great kindness, and repenteth Him of “the evil”? Nay, as he whispers the

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trembling word, he feels it is whispered not in vain. "There is *mercy* with Thee." O God, we thank Thee that it is so! Well then, let this be our first cry, "Have mercy." We all need it. Whenever we approach God's throne, in public or in private, let our first cry be for mercy and pardon. The Publican's place is the place for us. Like him, we would stand afar off, and smite upon our breasts, and say, 'God 'be merciful to us sinners!'

And what shall be the measure of the mercy? Our sins? That were well, brethren, for they are great enough. But there is something greater still. What is that? It is God's goodness. Yes, it is after His great goodness, according to the multitude of His mercies, that we would ask Him to measure the mercy we implore. We plead His own nature and cha-

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racter. We say, "O God, whose nature
"and property is `ever to have mercy
"and forgive." We pray, "Have
"mercy,"—not according to our de-
servings,—nay, not even according to
our needs,—but "Have mercy" accord-
ing to Thine own infinite goodness, for
then it will be a mercy infinite too.
O brethren, think not of God as a stern
hard just and terrible God. Has He
shown Himself to be so? Was it in
such a character that He revealed
Himself to man through His beloved
Son? And yet is there not a tendency
in some minds to think of the Father
as unforgiving—as "extreme to mark
"what is done amiss"—except as re-
conciled and propitiated by the merits
and sufferings of the Son? But is
not this almost to disbelieve in the
unity of God? Is it not almost to
say that the Father and Son are

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not *one*?* Nay, my brethren, let us never doubt God's infinite love. "God is LOVE." What plainer words would we have? And "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son" to die for the world. What fuller proof would we ask? That love we plead—that love, as shining out in every word and act of the blessed Saviour upon earth; that love, as crowned and perfected in the sacrifice of the Cross itself. God forbid that we should ever be tempted to doubt His "great goodness" or "the multitude of His mercies."

But what more shall we ask? "Mercy" embraces all we need. Yet earnest prayer loves to be particular. It is not content with some vague

* See a Sermon for Trinity Sunday, by Dr. Vaughan, in Vol. 2 of "Sermons for the Christian Year." S. P. C. K.

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general petition. It would reckon over and sum up all its several needs and desires. It would dwell on that which it seeks so eagerly. It would rather repeat its wants, than hastily pass them over, or fail to state them fully. Do we not know how we plead with a fellow-man for something we very earnestly long for? We put it in every light; we enforce it with every argument; we make our petition again and again. Our words, our manner, our importunity, all show that we really desire very strongly what we are asking for. Should it not be so in prayer to God? At least, if any one argues that, because God both knows our needs and is willing to grant them, therefore we need not plead with Him thus earnestly, let him think if his argument is not just as good against all prayer whatsoever.

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Thus he who cries, "Have mercy," cries also, "Do away my offences." Here is the first work for mercy to do. And how truly does David elsewhere sing, "Blessed is he whose unrighteousness is forgiven, and whose sin is covered"! Think for a few moments of this blessedness. God has declared that every man shall be judged according to his works. "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." This is a very awful truth, and one which might well make the sinner shudder with great dread. To any one of us it would be a very awful thing for every sin of his whole life—all his most secret thoughts of sin—to be laid bare to any one eye, even the most indulgent. But for these to be proclaimed from the judgment-throne before the

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assembled world—in whatever manner such a thing is conceivable—this is, indeed an overwhelming thought of terror. But, thanks be to God, side by side with this awful truth we have a very comforting one. For the same God who tells us that He will judge us according to our works, tells us also that our sins may be put away so as to be remembered no more against us. “I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.” “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins.” Moreover, one of the terms of God’s New Covenant with man is this: “Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.” And it is this most blessed promise of the New Covenant which St. Paul describes as already fulfilled in the

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Colossian Christians to whom he wrote, when, speaking of their Baptism, he says, "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him," (that is, with Christ,) "having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross." Thus, I think, we need not fear to gather from Holy Scripture that, while the wicked and impenitent will certainly be judged according to all their wicked deeds and obstinate impenitence, yet the sins of believers are certainly blotted out by God's free mercy, and that, even as the guilt of their birth-sin is washed away, for Christ's sake, in the waters of Baptism, so too the guilt of their whole lives is, for Christ's

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sake, washed away in the tears of true repentance.

But David prays, "Wash me
"throughly from my wickedness, and
"cleanse me from my sin." Yes,
"wash me"—for I cannot wash myself
—from the deep-dyed stain. We
spoke indeed of sins washed away,
for Christ's sake, in the tears of repent-
ance. But what did we mean? We
meant that God takes the tears, and
therewith washes out the record that is
against us. We meant not that *we*
could do this. But do we not see
that there may be a confusion of ideas
here? There are two things to be
washed away:—1st. the record of our
sins in God's Book of remembrance,
and 2ndly. the stain of our sins in
our own souls. And God must do
both. We ourselves can do neither.
And these two sorts of washing are

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just the two great gifts of God to man; the one justification, the other sanctification. When God washes out the record of our sins, He justifies us, that is, He pardons and accepts us. When He washes out the stains from our souls, He sanctifies us, that is, He renews and purifies us. It is, I think, rather of the latter blessing than of the former, that David is speaking in the verse before us. Yet we must never forget how the two works always go together, or rather how they are in truth but different parts of the same work. For it is *one* God, who both justifies through the blood of Christ, and sanctifies through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Before we pass on, let us mark that word "thoroughly." True penitence seeks *entire* cleansing. There must be no *half* work. Yet this half-work is

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very very common. There is abundance of shallow half-repentance, quieting conscience for a while, but leaving the sin unsubdued, like a false skin formed over a wound before it is healed. Numbers, who feel some sorrow for their sins, and pray for mercy and pardon, are without that *thorough* cleansing, without which their sin will certainly break out again, like the unhealed wound.

Perhaps we may see this same truth in the words by which David describes that from which he would be washed and cleansed. It may be fanciful, and an undue pressure of the words, and yet in the two words "wickedness" and "sin" there may perchance be a distinction implied between the inward root or evil principle, and the outward fruit—the actually committed sin. And, if so, again we see how *thorough* must

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be our cleansing. It must go to the very root. Many repent of the *deed* of sin, when they see its bitter consequences, who take no heed of the evil *principle* from which it sprung. And yet to do this is sadly like cutting off the tops of some foul weed, while we leave the root in the ground, ready in a little while to shoot up all the stronger.

And now the Psalmist confesses more expressly the sin, which has indeed been filling his mind all along, and prompting every word he has uttered. "For I acknowledge my faults, and my sin is ever before me." Confession is ever a part of true repentance. In the true penitent there can be no dissembling or cloaking of his manifold sins and wickedness. He will tell them all out, as he tells out his wants, unto God. True, God knows

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them already far better than he himself can know them. And yet God requires us to confess our sins. But why? Certainly not to acquaint *Him* with them, but to acquaint *ourselves* with them; not that *He* may know them better, but that *we* may know them better, and feel them more deeply. It is here as it is with prayer. God does not seek to be informed of our needs. But He would have us show our reliance upon Him, and our earnest longing for His blessings. And He would have us deepen our shame and our sorrow by recounting our sins in lowly self-abasement before His footstool. Well for us, dear brethren, if we never lie down to rest without humbly confessing the sins of the past day, and seeking,—aye, and finding, (for, if we seek, we *shall* find,)—pardon and peace through Jesus Christ. David at

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least knew the blessedness of confession, for he writes,—“I said I will confess
“my sins unto the Lord: and so Thou
“forgavest the wickedness of my sin.”

But David did not lightly forget the sin he confessed before God. His sin was “*ever before him.*” He took no brief hasty view of it, forgotten almost as soon as made. He had a permanent abiding consciousness of it. And is not this just the spirit and tone we should seek to gain in this Lenten season? Is it not just the way to keep us humble and lowly? Oh! may that Holy Spirit, whose first work is to “convince the
“world of sin,” keep our sins ever before us, that we may not soon forget how grievously we have offended against our heavenly Father’s love, nor ever cease to feel our helpless weakness, and to “watch and pray lest we enter into
“temptation.”

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Now, when our sin is ever before us, mark what thoughts it will give rise to. David teaches us, when he adds, "Against Thee only have I sinned, "and done this evil in Thy sight." Here we see the true way to realize the greatness of sin. We shall never do so till we place its hideous deformity in the light of God's purity and perfection. To compare self with God—this is to humble self in the very dust. We come with our sin ever before us, and enter the presence of One who is "of "purer eyes than to behold evil, and "cannot look upon iniquity," and then we begin to feel what we really are—what we must seem to that all-pure all-searching Eye. Then we know how truly one spake of old, when he said, "Behold even to the "moon, and it shineth not; yea, the "stars are not pure in His sight. How

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“much less man that is a worm, and
“the son of man, who is a worm”!

When the Psalmist said, “Against
“Thee *only* have I sinned,” we must
not press this word “*only*,” as if it were
meant to exclude *man*. David had
sinned most fearfully against man, as
well as against God. He had broken
deliberately both the sixth and the
seventh commandments, and he was
not certainly making light now of
his wanton injuries and wrongs to man.
We must rather understand him to
mean, ‘This is the only thing I can
‘think of now—the only view of my
‘deadly sin which rises up before me
‘now—namely, how grievously I have
‘offended *Thee*. Now I see what my
‘sin has been; now I know what wrath
‘it deserves;—now that I look upon
‘Thee, the God who has heaped
‘benefits upon me, who hast loved

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‘me with so vast a love, who hast
‘been so ready even to put away my
‘sin ; now I know how vile and hateful
‘I am. “ Father, I have sinned against
‘“ heaven, and in *Thy sight*,” and this it
‘is which bows me down so mightily.’
Such, I think, is David’s meaning here.

And David’s sin was not without
its earthly punishment. God took
from him the child of his sin, whom he
loved very dearly. But he does not
murmur or complain. He does not
exclaim, “ My punishment is greater
“than I can bear.” Nay, he knows
better what his real deservings are.
And he calls up the blackness and
ingratitude of his sin against God,
that he may defend God’s justice
against any that would question it.
“ Against Thee only have I sinned,
“and done this evil in Thy sight : that
“Thou mightest be justified in Thy

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“saying, and clear when Thou art “judged.” That is, that all may see that Thou art just in pronouncing judgment upon me, and that no fault may be found with Thy dealings when men would judge of them. My brethren, if we saw our own sins, our own guilt, our own deservings, as David saw his, could there be such a thing amongst us as murmuring and repining at what God is pleased to lay upon us? What are the worst pains and sufferings, what the most grievous losses and afflictions which could befall us here,—what even three-score and ten years of nought but pain and misery,—to that which we deserve, were we only rewarded according to our deeds? And, if these sufferings here below are permitted, as by God’s mercy they are, to “work for us a far “more exceeding and eternal weight

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“of glory,” oh! then, who will dare to cavil and question God’s justice and mercy in these things? Nay, O Lord, we will not murmur. Do with us as seemeth Thee good. Lay upon us what Thou wilt. We know Thou dost not willingly afflict, nor grieve the children of men. We know that whom Thou lovest Thou chastenest, and scourgest every son whom Thou receivest. We know that we deserve all—yea far more than all—the sufferings Thou layest upon us. Whatsoever Thou sayest of us, Thou art justified. However foolish men may judge Thee, Thou art clear. Yea, O Lord, we pray Thee rather to punish us here than hereafter; rather to lay upon us a chastening stroke of Thy Fatherly hand to awaken us to repentance now, than to suffer us to go on in the deadly

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slumber of sin or carelessness till it is too late, and we only wake to find the door shut, and ourselves shut out, for ever!

3.

Psalm li. 5—8. (Prayer-book version.)

“Behold, I was shapen in wickedness:
“and in sin hath my mother conceived
“me.

“But lo, Thou requirest truth in the
“inward parts: and shall make me to
“understand wisdom secretly.

“Thou shalt purge me with hyssop,
“and I shall be clean: Thou shalt wash
“me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

“Thou shalt make me hear of joy and
“gladness: that the bones which Thou
“hast broken may rejoice.”

IN the first of these four verses the Psalmist speaks of that taint and corruption of our nature which we generally call ‘original sin.’ And thus he goes to the root of the whole matter, acknowledging that by his very birth and nature he is a sinful being, deserving God’s wrath and condemnation.

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Let us think a little of this sad inheritance of sin, and of all its bitter fruit.

Mark a child just born into the world. Is he born pure, spotless, innocent? No; he is, alas! a child of *wrath*, even as others. That is, he is born a sinful, impure, being; he inherits a corrupt nature; he has nothing in him which can deliver him from God's just wrath against sin. He comes of a guilty stock; he shares in an heritage of guilt. He is one of a fallen generation. He is a child of Adam's seed: and "in Adam all die." It is very sad to be compelled to think thus of a little helpless babe, so innocent of all actual sin. And yet is it not true? Leave that little child to itself. Teach it, if you can, neither good nor evil. I need not ask you which way its natural heart will lead

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it. I need not ask you whether it will show signs of a heavenly origin, or signs of a sinful nature. But indeed we cannot thus leave it to itself. So let us follow its probable course. Very soon the child is brought to the font to be baptized. But why? If it were pure and clean, it would need no baptism. Baptism is itself the strongest proof of original sin. It would have no sense or meaning except for original sin. If the child were without stain or guilt in God's sight, why seek for heavenly washing? If the child were born in the full sunshine of God's favour and love, why seek acceptance and adoption through the Saviour's holy ordinance? Certainly Baptism depends in a great measure for its very meaning and reality upon this truth, "Behold, I was shapen in wickedness, and in sin hath my mother conceived me."

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In that holy sacrament we believe that the guilt of original sin is put away, and the wrath of God exchanged for grace and love ; and he that was born a " child of wrath " becomes a " child of grace," being " accepted in the Beloved." But what then ? Is the evil nature destroyed from thenceforth ? Is the original sin done away ? Does no taint and corruption remain " in them that are regenerated,"* that is, born again into the blessed family of God's adopted children ? Nay, brethren, the youngest child amongst us would not, I think, be slow to answer this. Our own hearts answer for us loudly enough. Or let the little newly baptized infant answer for us. A little while, and his natural heart begins to show itself plainly enough. What do we see ? Even where the

* Art. IX.

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grace of God, and the fostering care of godly parents, are most manifest, are there no marks of waywardness, disobedience, self-will, evil-temper, revenge, and such like? And what do these prove but the abiding presence of original sin? What do they show but that the corrupt nature is living and powerful still? The Holy Spirit may be moulding and changing the childish heart. Many fruits of the Spirit may unfold and ripen as time goes on. Yet there, all the time, is that other 'law in the members,' that old "law of sin and death," "warring against" the good. And that law is the power of original sin. But pass on a little. The child grows in stature. It may be he also grows in "wisdom," "and in favour with God" "and man." Still the evil nature is there. It may be subdued, and weak-

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ened, and kept under. But it is not wholly dead. Why else do we dread for him what we call the 'dangerous season of youth'? Why else too those heavy falls—those sad disappointments—those outbreaks of the old nature? Or suppose a different course. Suppose the child to grow up without God in the world: suppose him to pass long years in deadness and coldness, or more marked and open sin. And then suppose him to be brought by God's mercy to true penitence—to be truly converted—to return, like the prodigal, to his Father,—to have been dead, and to be alive again—to have been lost, and to be found. Make his sorrow as deep as you can. Make his change of heart as complete as possible. And then let us ask once more, Is the original sin gone *now*? Has the grace of penitence prevailed to

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the utter destruction of the old nature? Nay, my friends, ye know full well there will be sins and failings still. From wilful and deliberate sins perchance he may by God's power be saved. But let us not make too sure even of this. And then what shall we say of those "negligences and "ignorances,"—those sins of infirmity,—the want of love, the coldness of heart, the faintness in prayer, the straying thoughts, the worldly leanings,—which he mourns—and *will* mourn—all his life long? What, but that they too are the marks, and the remains, of that original sin, that corruption of nature, which he inherited at his birth, and which cleaves to him so long as he bears the likeness of him who was "of "the earth earthy."

And are there no other marks and signs of the corruption of our nature

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besides those which we find in our own sinful hearts? What are all outward evils? What are death and all its attendant ills? What are sickness and pain and bereavement? Are they not all standing witnesses of the evil that is within us? Are they not the direct fruits and consequences of that evil? And yet behold the mercy and loving-kindness of God! Those very ills, which are the appointed punishment, and the natural fruit, of our sinful nature, are made also its remedy. The sin of the world is like a poisonous plant whose fruit is an antidote to the poison. And oh! how many have learned to bless sickness, or pain, or sorrow, for leading them to the healing of the curse of their original sin!

“But lo!” says the Psalmist, “Thou
“requirest truth in the inward parts;
“and shalt make me to understand

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“wisdom secretly.” This is a strange verse at first sight. David has spoken of the sin and wickedness of his nature. But God, he goes on to say, requireth ‘*truth*’ and ‘*wisdom*.’ We should much rather have expected him to say ‘purity’ and ‘holiness,’ as the opposite to wickedness and sin. But this is just one of those places where we may note the close connection between knowledge and practice. The sinner knows not the truth, even as he knows not God. “He that saith, “I know Him, and keepeth not His “commandments, is a liar, and the “truth is not in him.” The sinner’s life is one long falsehood; one ceaseless denial of God’s truth. Truth and sin are at enmity one with another. And so too wisdom. Nay, wisdom is even more at enmity with sin than truth is. For many parts of God’s

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truth the sinner may comprehend. But he can have nothing of real wisdom. For wisdom is truth, or the knowledge of truth, applied to practice. And thus David asks, "Are they not without understanding that work wickedness?"—while the wise man tells us, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." And so it certainly is. For holiness is the only true wisdom; and all sin is folly. And though we may talk of other wisdom beside this, yet it is only the "wisdom of this world" which "is foolishness with God." We must note too that God requires truth "*in the inward parts*," and will make his servants to understand wisdom "*secretly*." It is no outward confession or profession which will suffice. It must be truth rooted in the inmost soul—wisdom making wise the secret heart. And this is

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precisely the province of Faith. For is not the work of Faith mainly this, to take the truths of God, and to make them such vivid momentous abiding realities to us, that they must needs guide and govern our whole being? Does not Faith in short *turn knowledge into wisdom*? Does it not bind heart and head together, so that 'truth' becomes living action, and 'wisdom' is but another side of holiness? And, if so, we can well understand how King David, after speaking of the corruption of his nature, contrasts with this the 'truth' and 'wisdom' which God requires. That 'truth' is truth which shall make us free—free from the bondage of our natural corruption;—that 'wisdom' is wisdom which shall make us wise indeed—even "wise unto "salvation."

And *how* does God make us to "un-

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“derstand wisdom secretly”? Surely by giving to us that Holy Spirit who is expressly called, “the Spirit of truth.” What saith St. James? “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” I think we none of us seek wisdom sufficiently in this way. We all trust too much to our own natural talents, or received notions. We are very faithless as to God’s promises. He does not indeed promise to work a miracle for our enlightenment, or to teach us mysteries, and unfold to us hidden knowledge, in answer to our prayers. But He does promise to give us wisdom—that is, to give us the spirit to judge wisely and well in practical matters, so that we may walk safely and not err in our steps.

And now David goes on to declare

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his full and firm belief in God's purposes of mercy towards him. He has already said that, corrupt and sinful as he was, yet God would give him the blessing of a wise and understanding heart. "Thou shalt make me to understand wisdom secretly." And we have seen how in David's mind this heavenly wisdom was very closely joined with its natural and certain fruit of holiness. God would teach him His laws, and he would keep them with his whole heart. With heavenly *teaching*, he looked for heavenly *cleansing*. The Power that would enlighten, would also purify. "Thou shalt purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." This verse refers to a custom under the Jewish law. By that law, if a person touched a dead body, or

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a grave, he was accounted unclean, and had to be purified by being sprinkled with hyssop dipped in the "water of separation," as it was called,—that is, water set apart and consecrated to this special use. Now all such ceremonies were manifestly types and figures of hidden and spiritual truths to be revealed in due time. Our Saviour shows us very plainly that the defilement which the Jew set down to some outward act was only meant to teach us the true defilement of sin. "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man," are His words, "but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man." Not what a man eats or drinks, as the Jews taught, but what a man thinks and speaks, this it is which really makes him clean or unclean. And so, too, it is not the touch

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of a dead body, or of a grave, which can defile a man in the sight of God ; but the touch of the corruption of sin, the return to dead passions and buried lusts. It is from these things we truly need a spiritual purging. And truly, my brethren, there is such a purging ever ready for us, if we will but come to it to be cleansed : “ for if the blood “ of bulls and of goats, and the ashes “ of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, “ sanctifieth to the purifying of the “ flesh : how much more shall the blood “ of Christ, who, through the eternal “ Spirit, offered Himself, without spot, “ to God, purge your conscience from “ dead works to serve the living God ? ” St. Augustine draws out, perhaps somewhat fancifully, the fitness of hyssop to be used in that ceremonial cleansing which was typical of the spiritual cleansing of the heart. The hyssop is a

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medicinal herb, purifying in its nature ; and thus teaches us the cleansing and purifying character of true penitence. It is lowly in its growth ; and the true penitent is ever " clothed with humility." It clings closely to the rock on which it grows ; and the true penitent will ever cling for support to the Rock of Ages. Oh ! that we may know what it is to have our sin-stained hearts purged with the hyssop of true repentance ! Oh ! that in true repentance they may, indeed, be sprinkled with the " blood of Jesus Christ," which " cleanseth us from all sin " ! Perchance our sins are " as scarlet," and " red like crimson." So were David's. Yet he did not despair. And shall we despair, while God's message is this : " Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord : though " your sins be as scarlet, they shall

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“be as white as snow; though they
“be red like crimson, they shall be
“as wool.” God clothe us with the
marriage garment “as white as snow.”
God bring us to join that glorious
multitude whom St. John saw in his
vision standing before the throne,
“clothed with white robes, and palms
“in their hands,” and of whom he is
told, by one of the heavenly beings,
that they had “washed their robes,
“and made them white in the blood
“of the Lamb.”

But the Psalmist does not *only* hope
for cleansing. He has a brighter hope
beyond. “Thou shalt make me hear
“of joy and gladness, that the bones
“that Thou hast broken may rejoice.”
David felt that, when he was pardoned
and cleansed, he should once more
gain that “joy and gladness” which
springs from the sense of God’s favour

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and the "answer of a good conscience
"towards God." He felt he should
have "joy and peace in believing."
He had been heavy at heart, stricken
down under the weight of his sin. He
knew God would take that burden from
him. He had already been told so
by God's messenger. For when he
confessed his sin, Nathan said, "The
"Lord also hath put away thy sin."
This was great comfort. Perhaps he
could not take it all home to himself,
or realise it, quite at once. It seemed
so much more than he could deserve.
But it had shed a bright ray of hope
down into his darkened soul. Heavi-
ness had endured for the night. But
joy would come in the morning. And
he had seen the first streak of dawn.
And he had faith to believe in God's
promises and messages of mercy. O
my friends, why is this faith so rare

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amongst us? Why do we so seldom discern that ray of hope and comfort which fell upon David's sorrowing heart? Do God's servants bear no message of mercy now? Have His commissioned ministers no word of cheering hope and peace to speak to the sin-burdened soul? What else is that solemn and blessed announcement—alas! how coldly heard, how faithlessly received, in these days!—"He pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe His holy Gospel"? Is it not the most blessed announcement lips of man could utter? Should it not be more like Nathan's message, fuller of comfort and hope than it mostly is? Aye, if confession were *real*, if the outpouring of a sinful heart were earnest and faithful, if "We have erred and strayed from Thy ways like

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“lost sheep” were spoken as an utter truth, and not as an empty form,—then “He pardoneth and absolveth” would become *real* too. Then, however unworthy the sinner might feel of such pardon,—such loosing of the chains of his sins,—yet faith would at least bring a ray of “joy and gladness” to his mourning heart. He would feel that he had sorrowed for his sin, and confessed it, truly. And he would believe God’s word when He says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” And humbly, yet very thankfully, would he take to himself the assurance of pardon and peace, which the words of absolution are meant to convey. He has done *his* part; why should he doubt that God also has done *His*? He has confessed; why should he

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doubt God's pardon? We want to know more what that meaneth: "Blessed are they that mourn, for "they shall be comforted." There is comfort for us, only we will not accept it.

The *great* reason why we know so little of this comfort is because we have so little true penitence. God "pardonesth and absolveth all them that "*truly repent.*" We do not "*truly repent.*" So how can we claim the pardon and absolution? But I think there may be some who *ought* to claim these blessings, and yet who fail to do so;—some who do truly repent, and yet cannot take the comfort they ought in the assurance of pardon. I may be speaking now to some one who is in this state, who grieves very deeply and truly for his sins, and yet who sees no ray of light shining upon him

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to cheer him with the hope of pardon. O brother, I know how dark and wretched such a state is. Let us see if we can find no way to escape from it. May it not be that you are looking too entirely upon yourself, and your own wretched sinfulness? May it not be that, while you "truly repent," you do not "unfeignedly believe" God's holy Gospel? You look all *within*,—see nothing but yourself, in your hopeless helpless sinfulness. It is enough to make you despair. But ought you not to look up and away from yourself? Ought you not to look up to the Cross of Calvary, to a dying Saviour, to a Father's infinite love? I am sure you may easily think too much of self, and thus be "swallowed up with over-much sorrow." I do not tell you to think little of your own sins. But I do tell you to think much of your

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Saviour. I do not want you to make your repentance less deep. But I do want you to make your faith more strong. And I pray God that each one of us who is striving to repent truly may learn (perhaps not at once, but more and more fully,) the comfort and peace of the penitent's hope, and may "hear of joy and gladness" in God's good time through the mercies of Jesus Christ our Redeemer.

4.

Psalm li. 9—12. (Prayer-book version.)

**“Turn Thy face from my sins: and
“put out all my misdeeds.**

**“Make me a clean heart, O God: and
“renew a right spirit within me.**

**“Cast me not away from Thy pre-
“sence: and take not Thy Holy Spirit
“from me.**

**“O give me the comfort of Thy help
“again: and stablish me with Thy free
“Spirit.”**

IN a very little while you and I, my brethren, will be standing before the judgment throne. Whether or no we shall first have passed through the mystery of death we cannot tell. We may be among the dead, who in their graves “shall hear the voice of the “Son of God,” and “shall come forth.” Or we may be of those who “are alive

SERMON IV.

“and remain” unto the coming of the Lord. But, in any case, when the books are opened in that day, and we are “judged out of those things which are written in the books, according to our works,” oh! what would we give to be sure that those dreadful books contained no record of our sins! And yet it may be so. That record, which we so much fear, may be quite wiped and blotted out, as though it had never been. For “who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.” Yes, if God justifies us—that is, pardons and accepts us—our sins can hurt us and condemn us no more. For He

SERMON IV.

will blot out as a thick cloud our transgressions, and as a cloud our sins. Our sins and iniquities He will remember no more. And He *does* justify those that are in Christ Jesus. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." In that precious blood the record may be washed away. Christ has died : Christ has risen again : Christ prays for us : and the Father accepts His offering and His prayer : and the sinner is pardoned, and the sin is blotted out, and the Saviour seeth of the travail of His soul and is satisfied. Brethren, it is *unrepented* sin which will be found written in those books on the judgment-day. True repentance avails to the wiping out of sin through the blood of Jesus Christ.

It is this blessing for which David makes request when he says, "Turn
"Thy face from my sin : and put out

SERMON IV.

“all my misdeeds.” He has already confessed his sin, both original and actual,—both the fault and corruption of his nature, and his many wilful transgressions. And he has acknowledged that it is God alone who can cleanse and restore him. And now he comes with a direct prayer for the putting away of his sin. And let us note his words. “Turn Thy face from my sin.” Yea, Lord, we would every one of us take up Thy servant’s prayer, and say, “Turn Thy face from my sin.” “If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?” “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity.” Oh! behold not my great evil, look not on my grievous iniquity. Turn away Thy face, but not from *me*, O Lord; “cast *me* not away from Thy presence,” for in that presence only is

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‘ “fulness of joy.” Yet turn away Thy
‘ face from my sin. O separate in Thy
‘ great mercy the sinner from the sin.
‘ Look upon the sinner, but hide Thy face
‘ from the sin. Blot it, O merciful God,
‘ from Thy book of remembrance. Re-
‘ member it no more. I forget it not,
‘ O Lord, for “my sin is ever before
‘ “me.” I would not forget it, lest I
‘ grow proud, or careless, or confident.
‘ But while I remember it, and will ever
‘ remember it, in penitence and self-
‘ abasement, do Thou, O Lord, “turn
‘ “Thy face from my sin, and put out
‘ “all my misdeeds.”” Thus would we
pray. I would trust many such prayers
have gone up from amongst us already.
They are fitting prayers for such a time
as this, wherein we seek to deepen our
sense of sin, and to learn new lessons of
penitence. And we may stay a mo-
ment here to mark how rich with bless-

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ings is the path of true penitence. Hope springs out of mourning. Peace is begotten of the heart's bitterest throes. Joy and gladness burst from the soil watered with the tears of godly sorrow. It is ever thus. The darker the mourning the brighter the hope. It is just when we begin to see how hateful our sins are that we begin also to understand how God may turn His face from them, and put them out. The sense of sin and the sense of pardon mostly grow together. But let us beware of a danger here. The discovery that God is willing to remember our sins and iniquities no more is in truth a very blessed one. But some have gone farther than this. Some have fancied that, because God is so ready to blot out their sins from His remembrance, they may blot them out of their own. I have heard people argue that we

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ought to forget our past sins as though they had never been, and had nothing to do with us. I do not think this is Scripture doctrine. I think it often leads to being satisfied with the shallowest pretence of a repentance; to being content with that vague, hasty, unreal, transient, half repentance, which is so common and so fatal a snare. A few prayers, a few sighs, an attempt to believe that all is right, and that the past may be forgotten because it is forgiven,—this is the way how often! And then what follows? Generally a very speedy fall: often, after a few such vain half-efforts, a reckless, faithless, almost hopeless, state, in which the wretched cry is ever, ‘It is no use trying.’ Oh! dear brethren, while we believe—most thankfully believe—in God’s readiness to put our misdeeds from His remembrance, let us never

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make the fatal mistake of thinking that we may put them out of our own remembrance, or cease, while life shall last, to mourn for them and to take warning by them.

As we see again and again, in this and in all other parts of holy Scripture, pardon cannot be severed from cleansing, there cannot be justification without sanctification. And thus David at once goes on to utter the prayer, "Make me
"a clean heart, O God: and renew a
"right spirit within me." "A clean
"heart"; aye, this is what we want. Sin has stained and befouled our hearts long enough. We want all this foulness washed away. It will not do to have the record of our sins washed away in God's book, while the filth of them remains in our own hearts. There must be a *change* there; else it is vain to talk of either penitence or pardon.

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Repentance is an empty name without change of heart. Pardon is a boon we dare not claim while we feel our sins are living and strong within us. What does God say by the mouth of His prophet Ezekiel? "Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart, and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" And how does the Apostle confirm this truth? "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." And see how God commands us to work this work in ourselves, "Make *you* a new heart, and a new spirit:" while, at the same time, it is most plainly His gift, for David's prayer is, "Make me a clean heart, O God;" and God Himself promises, "I will put a new spirit

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“ within you ; and I will take the stony
“ heart out of their flesh, and will give
“ them an heart of flesh.” Yes, here
is the old mystery : “ Work out your
“ own salvation,” “ for it is God which
“ worketh in you.” God’s work and
man’s work : no power of ourselves
even to think anything good without
God ; no pledge of the aid of God’s
power without our own earnest striv-
ings : everything to make us humble,
because all is of God ; everything to
make us diligent, because all depends
on ourselves :—it is the old mystery,—
hard to speculate upon ; easy to prac-
tise. For what does it come to ?
Simply this. First, that we “ pray and
“ faint not,” never ceasing to cry to
God for help, never ceasing to lean
upon His strength and not our own.
And, secondly, that we labour and
strive with all our might. And here,

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in this matter of the "clean heart," while we ask God to give us this priceless boon, yet we dare not do so except we strive earnestly to make our own hearts clean. We know that every stain must be removed before we can call them clean. And we know that for this there must be a most diligent searching out of the inmost chambers of the heart. It is easy enough to pass over many and many a foul stain in a hasty glance. The eye must be practised, and must get accustomed to this searching scrutiny. Self-examination must become a habit. We must learn to know ourselves, and to weigh, and test, and disentangle, our most secret thoughts and motives. The conscience must be kept very true, and very tender, by constant obedience to its commands. And in this way we shall do our part towards the gaining of that

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“clean heart,” which, after all, is in the end the very gift of God.

One more thought about this “clean heart.” Our blessed Lord speaks of a house “empty, swept, and garnished.” This is what a man’s heart is likened to “when the evil spirit is gone out” of him. The sin is cast out. That which held possession before is gone. The heart is “clean” from the foul sins that polluted it. So far well. But Christ speaks of the evil spirit *returning* to such a house—aye, and not only returning, but bringing with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, who enter in and dwell there, so that the last state of that man is worse than the first. And what does this tell us? Is it not that it is quite possible to cast out sin, and to cleanse the heart, and then to stop, leaving the house “empty,” only waiting the return of

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the old sins in sevenfold power? Well does David add to his prayer for a "clean heart," a prayer for the renewal of a right spirit within him. He would not leave the house empty. He would take into it a new inmate. He would give it new employment. He would fill it with a new spirit. Lusts, and worldliness, and deeds of darkness, should be cleansed away. But for lusts he would have the love of God; for worldliness he would have heavenly-mindedness; for deeds of darkness he would have works of holiness. Prayer and praise and a righteous life should be where sin and wickedness and misdeeds had been. A vacant empty unemployed unfilled heart is open to the entrance of every evil spirit. David knew this. And while he asked for a "clean heart," he failed not also to ask for the renewal of a "right spirit" within him.

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Let us pass on to the next petition.
“Cast me not away from Thy presence:
“and take not Thy Holy Spirit from
“me.” We cannot really be cast out
of God’s presence, for His “eyes are in
“every place beholding the evil and
“the good.” And David himself sings:
—“Whither shall I go then from Thy
“Spirit? or whither shall I go then
“from Thy presence? If I climb up
“into heaven, Thou art there: if I
“go down to hell, Thou art there also.
“If I take the wings of the morning;
“and remain in the uttermost parts
“of the sea; even there also shall
“Thy hand lead me, and Thy right
“hand shall hold me. If I say, Per-
adventure the darkness shall cover
“me: then shall my night be turned
“to day. Yea, the darkness is no
“darkness with Thee, but the night
“is as clear as the day: the darkness

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“and light to Thee are both alike.” No, we cannot really escape from God’s presence. But there is a sense and perception of His presence from which we may indeed be cast out, from which how many verily cast themselves out! Our sins truly separate between us and our God. They are like a thick cloud, hiding away from us the light of His countenance. The light is shining, but we see it not. And how many, brethren, because they only see the cloud hanging dark and heavy close above them, refuse to believe that the sun of God’s infinite love is shining ever gloriously beyond, filling all heaven and earth with its blessed light, and life, and warmth. Oh! God grant we may realise His blissful presence. That He is ever near us, with us, about us, we do not doubt. Yet we wrap our faces in the dark mantle of our sins,

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and will not behold Him, "though
"He be not far from every one of us.
"For in Him we live, and move, and
"have our being." May God, with the
breath of His power, scatter the mists
and clouds, that we may gain at least
some bright glimpses of the great open
heaven above, that we may at least
sometimes win a vision of love vaster
than the fathomless depths of swim-
ming blue, and believe in—if as yet
we may not grasp—the "fulness of
"joy" which is in the presence of
God.

King David had not been without
his share of the light of God's coun-
tenance. It had indeed been hidden
from him for a while. But he had
known it before. And he had certainly
been gifted with God's Holy Spirit.
Else he could not have prayed, "Take
"not Thy Holy Spirit from me." It

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seemed as if that Spirit were almost gone. He had at least done what he could by his sin to quench that Spirit. But God is "long-suffering" and "patient," and, though His Spirit will "not always strive with man," yet is He "slow to anger and of great kindness, and repenteth Him of the evil." And David had good proof that God had not quite taken away His Holy Spirit from him in the very penitence and contrition he was then feeling. How could he have repented at all—how could he have prayed thus earnestly—if it had not been for the guiding of God's good Spirit? And that same Spirit is given to us. "Know ye not," saith the Apostle, "that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God?" and again, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and

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“that the Spirit of God dwelleth in
“you?” It is a fearful thought that
of the indwelling Spirit of God. For
what follows? “If any man shall
“defile the temple of God, him shall
“God destroy; for the temple of God
“is holy, which temple ye are.” Oh!
should not this thought make us
tremble to allow the entrance of even
the least thought of sin? Should we
not dread lest we defile the temple
in which God’s Spirit dwells, or lest
by our sins we drive Him away from
His dwelling-place? Alas! how many
are there who dare not say “Take
“not Thy Holy Spirit from me;”
whose prayer must rather be that
which follows: “O give me the com-
“fort of Thy help again.” Restore
‘to me that which I have wantonly
‘lost. Bring back to me that blessed
‘Spirit whom I have driven away so

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‘long. Leave me not to myself, but ‘save me, ere I be lost for ever.’ But God grant there are many of us who need not shrink from uttering with our Church in all her services that brief prayer, so well befitting the sin-stained soul, which yet can hope that God has not wholly forsaken it, “O God, “make clean our hearts within us. “And take not Thy Holy Spirit “from us.”

One verse remains for us to consider to-day, and a very beautiful one it is. “O give me the comfort of Thy help “again ; and stablish me with Thy free “Spirit.” “The comfort of Thy help.” This is an expression worth thinking about. God’s help is a comfort to His people. But how ? Surely because it is a pledge and proof that He is with them ; that He has not deserted them. Let us try to make this thought more

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real to us. I will ask you, my brethren, Have you ever known this *comfort*? Perhaps not. Yet you certainly have known the *help*. You have known moments when God has wrestled with you, as it were; when you have been stayed, warned, perhaps saved, on the very brink of some sin. You have known a good thought, a sincere wish for good, put, you know not how, into your heart. You have known a true grief and sorrow seize you when you have yielded to temptation, so that you could not rest till you had sought pardon from God. You have felt at times that you were not quite left to yourself, that God's Spirit was striving with you. What was all this but God's *help*? Be it ever so little a thing—be it but one earnest prayer,—but one honest resistance to a temptation,—but one deep

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conviction of sin,—still it *was* God's help. It could not be your own power which wrought it. Well, then, should not this *comfort* you? May you not—ought you not to—say thus with yourself: ‘I am miserably far from what I ought to be. I am very weak, very sinful, very guilty. Yet I have had *help* sometimes. I was helped at such a time to pray. I was helped again to flee from this or that temptation. I was helped, I know, to feel grieved when I sinned so sadly. Is not this a sign that God is not leaving me to myself? Is it not a sign that He wills my salvation, and that His arm is outstretched for me to lean upon when I will? I am very thankful for this *help*, little as I know I have profited by it. It is a great *comfort* to me: for God changes not. He will not help me to-day, and desert me to-

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‘morrow. I will trust Him more. I
‘will believe in Him more. I will
‘not despair because I have as yet
‘attained to so little. I will say, “It
“is mine own infirmity: but I will
“remember the years of the right
“hand of the most highest.” I will
‘think of the help He has given me
‘heretofore, and I will take comfort.’
Yes; I am sure we ought all of us
oftener to feel this. The very least
good we are enabled to do ought to
make us feel ‘This is not of myself.
‘It is God’s doing. Therefore it is
‘a pledge that He is with me. I will
“give Him thanks for the help
“of his countenance;” and I will
‘pray, “Stablish the thing, O Lord,
“that Thou has wrought in me.”
“O stablish me with Thy free
“Spirit.”’

How needful, brethren, to be thus

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stablished! For us, so weak, so apt to fall,—for us, who “by reason of the
“frailty of our nature cannot always
“stand upright,”—how blessed to have
an Arm to lean upon that can never
fail, that is strong enough to “support
“us in all dangers, and carry us
“through all temptations.” That Arm
hath been stretched out to help us
many times. Shall I say ‘many
‘times’? Nay, shall I not rather say
‘at all times’? Yet many times have
we felt its blessed strength and power.
And it will not fail us now. God’s aid
is no grudging aid, doled in scant
measure to His suppliants. It is free,
as it is omnipotent. “Stablish me,”
cries the Psalmist, “with thy *free*
“Spirit.” The aid of that blessed Spirit
He “giveth *liberally*.” And that aid
is “sufficient for us.” Oh! that we
sought it more heartily and earnestly!

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Oh! that we realised it more faithfully! If King David might claim it under the Old Covenant, shall we be less ready to put forth our claim under the New Covenant? Nay, brothers, not in vain are we baptized members of Christ's body. Not in vain does St. Peter say, "The promise is unto you
"and to your children, and to all that
"are afar off, even as many as the
"Lord our God shall call." Not in vain does Jesus Himself say, "If ye,
"being evil, know how to give good
"gifts unto your children, how much
"more shall your Father which is in
"heaven give the Holy Spirit to them
"that ask Him." Oh! ask Him more earnestly, more faithfully. Plead with Him, for His own dear Son's sake, to bestow on you that blessed help which He has so freely promised. And then, believing that ye have that which ye

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have asked, lean trustfully on this support, and say, "I have set God always before me: for He is on my right hand, therefore I shall not fall."



5.

Psalm li. 13—15. (Prayer-book version.)

“Then shall I teach Thy ways unto
“the wicked: and sinners shall be con-
“verted unto Thee.

“Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O
“God, Thou that art the God of my
“health: and my tongue shall sing
“of Thy righteousness.

“Thou shalt open my lips, O Lord:
“and my mouth shall show Thy praise.”

THE true secret of teaching others is to feel what we teach ourselves. Unless our words come from the heart,—unless they are the fruit of our own experience,—they are little likely to fall with any weight upon those who listen to them. On the other hand, how powerful for good is the teaching of him who feels deeply the words he utters, who speaks of matters with

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which his own heart is familiar, who utters no formal doctrines, no cold theories, but the living realities of his inner being. And, when God has put out our misdeeds of His great mercy; when He has made us a clean heart, and a right spirit; when He has given us the comfort of His help again, and stablished us with His free Spirit; then we assuredly *shall* desire to teach others the good lesson which we ourselves have learnt. I suppose there is no surer proof of life and earnestness and reality in religion than the desire to impart to others the blessings we have gained ourselves. Certainly a man has advanced a very little way in his Christian course, — has a very little share of the Christian graces of faith and love, — who has no missionary spirit in him, no longing to make known to others the glorious truths he

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believes himself. “We *believe*, and “*therefore speak*;”—here is the clue to all true, great, earnest, work in the world. No work for the good of man was ever carried on with strength in the doing, or with success in the ending, of it, except in this way:—“We “believe, and therefore speak.” David believed;—believed the love, and mercy, and pardon, of God;—and he must needs speak. He had learnt new lessons of God’s ways, and he would teach those ways unto the wicked: he had been converted from his own sins, and he would see other sinners converted unto God. He was converted, and he would strengthen his brethren. And thus he cries in another psalm:—“O come hither and hearken, all ye “that fear God, and I will tell you “what He hath done for my soul.” And he does tell us. There is no one,

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with the single exception perhaps of St. Paul, in the whole world's history, of the inner life and feelings of whom we know so much as we do of King David's. His very soul is laid bare to us. We can trace the course of its most secret emotions. Its sins and virtues, its falls and recoveries, its hopes and fears, its joys and sorrows, all are told us—not in pride or boastfulness, but told us for our warning and comfort, for our correction and instruction in righteousness. And oh! have not David's words come true, when he says, "I will teach Thy ways
" unto the wicked, and sinners shall be
" converted unto Thee"? Who that has learnt anything of the ways of the Lord has not gathered many a precious lesson from the Psalms of David? How many have his blessed words helped to turn from their sins to the

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Lord? What joy will it be to the Psalmist's loving heart to know one day (if he knows it not now) how many poor sinners have been roused to the first thought of repentance by some verse which he sang of old; how many, whose sins had taken such hold upon them that they could not look up, have won their first gleam of comfort and peace from his bright faith, and loving trust in God! Can we number the sorrow-stricken hearts that have poured out their penitence before God's mercy-seat in this very 51st Psalm? Can we reckon how many sons of men have owed life, and grace, and comfort, and hope, and joy, and peace, to the "sweet Psalmist of Israel," during the three thousand years since first his glorious songs were sung?

And can we not, every one of us,

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if we will, share with David in this good work, and teach God's ways unto the wicked? O brothers, we want more zeal for others' souls,—more of the missionary spirit,—amongst us. We want to be more *like* brothers. We want to feel—and to act as if we felt—that we are one family in Christ, that we are fellow-travellers on the same great journey, fellow-strangers in a land that is not our own. We want to learn how to lend a helping hand, to say a little word of sympathy and encouragement, now and then, to a brother who is faint or lagging on the road. We don't do this half enough. We are too reserved, too selfish, too cowardly, too much ashamed of our religion. It costs us an effort to speak of our religion, or rather of our religious feelings. Well—perhaps we cannot help that. But that is no reason

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why the effort should not be made. Of course it is better not to speak of religion at all, than to speak irreverently, or hypocritically, and without deeply feeling what we say. Always let our words be *less*—not more—than our feelings. But I verily believe of all the hypocrites in the world,—that is, of all those who pretend to be what they are not,—there are quite as many who pretend to be worse than they are, as who pretend to be better than they are; quite as many who shrink, either from cowardice or often from some better feeling, from speaking words which would do good, as there are who speak good words which have no reality in the heart. I do not think we need fear being a little more open in speaking of religion one with another. Nay, I am sure it is a great need amongst us. Think for a moment

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if you can remember any one ever speaking to you seriously and kindly on religion, when you did not expect it. It may have been but two or three little words which showed you what was in his mind. Now did not those words impress you more than a whole year's sermons have often done? I am sure I have found it so myself. And does not this prove that we ought not to shrink so much as we do from speaking such words? Even when the person we are speaking to seems least likely to take heed to anything we may say, it is marvellous how irresistible is often the power of a few quiet kind serious words, when they are not expected. And, then, think how men band together, and use their influence, for evil. And why not equally for good? Why, because men love evil rather than good. There is no lack

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of hints, and suggestions, and plain-speaking too, to lure and encourage men to wickedness. But "the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." They know what power one man has over another by his words, and they use that power, while the Christian will not use it. Nay, sometimes a man will say, when speaking of this matter, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Can I answer for his soul as well as my own? Must not every man stand or fall to his own Master? Is not religion a matter between every man's conscience and his God, in which no one else can interfere? All this is simply false and selfish and unchristian. It is not the language of the Bible, which says, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." "Bear ye

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“one another’s burdens.” “Have the
“same care one for another.” While
those who speak as I have said most
certainly forget the glorious promise,
“They that be wise shall shine as the
“brightness of the firmament, and they
“that *turn many to righteousness* as the
“stars for ever and ever.”

The next words are these : “ Deliver
“me from blood-guiltiness, O God.”
Doubtless, when David spoke of “blood-
“guiltiness,” he remembered the stain
of blood which was upon his own
soul. He had procured the death of
Uriah. The guilt was even as though
he had murdered him with his own
hand. For I trust there is not one
of those I speak to so ignorant as to
suppose that to get a crime committed
by another is any less sin than to com-
mit it one’s-self. From this awful
guilt then, even the “blood-guiltiness”

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of the murderer, David prayed to be delivered. Can these words be used by us? Can we so understand this fearful word "blood-guiltiness" as to make David's prayer our own? I think we may in three ways. 1. By "blood-guiltiness" we may understand such guilt as would condemn us,—the guilt of deadly sin,—the guilt of such sin as brings our blood upon our own heads, and is in very truth self-murder. From such guilt who needs not to pray for deliverance! Such guilt follows upon all wilful, deliberate, presumptuous sins. And we would pray as David prayed, "Keep Thy servant "from presumptuous sins, lest they get "the dominion over me." Aye, for that dominion—how easily do they win it! How hard is it to shake off! And when "presumptuous sins" have gained such power over us, then are

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we truly in a state which may well be called "blood-guiltiness." For our guilt is very deep and fearful, and will destroy soul and body for ever. Or, 2ndly, We may understand the word as meaning the guilt of *others'* condemnation. For is there not such a crime, brethren, as *soul-murder*? And is it not a frightfully common crime? What shall we say of the man who leads another into deadly sin? Has such an one no "blood-guiltiness" upon his head? Look at a man who by his pattern or by his persuasions draws another into places of sin and leads him wilfully into temptation. Has that man no "blood-guiltiness"? Look at one who delights to make other minds as impure as his own by pouring into them the poison of corrupt and filthy talking. Has that man no "blood-guiltiness"? Look at the man

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of whom the prophet speaks when he says :—" Woe unto him that giveth his "neighbour drink, that putteth thy "bottle to him, and makest him "drunken." This is a common case enough, God forgive us! And has that man no "blood-guiltiness"? Look at one who, knowing and feeling what is right himself, stands by silent while others speak sinful words or do sinful acts. Has that man no "blood-guiltiness"? Look at the parent, who, by evil example, or it may be by simple neglect, like Eli, suffers his children to grow up in disobedience and godlessness. Has that man no "blood-guiltiness"? Oh! which of us is free from this form of guilt? Which of us has never felt 'If I had been 'brave enough to speak out, such and 'such things might have been stopped. 'If I had but stood out against it, such

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‘and such a sin would never have been ‘committed.’ And think we that we are free from the guilt of such sin, because others committed it? Nay, but, if we could have prevented it, certainly we are sharers in the sin and in the guilt. May God then deliver us from this most common form of ‘blood-guiltiness,’—the guiltiness of leading others to destruction, or of not saving them from it, when we could,—the guiltiness of what we may truly call *soul-murder*. There is yet a third meaning we may give to the word, and the most literal of all. For may we not by “blood-guiltiness” well express that guiltiness which caused the Son of God to shed His precious blood for us? Our sins verily nailed Him to the tree, for “without shedding “of blood there is no remission of sins.” And we may well think how deep

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must be the guilt of sins which needed such a sacrifice! From the guilt of such sins—of sins for which the blood of Jesus Christ alone could make atonement—from this we would be delivered. And we would not forget also that, whensoever we sin grievously, sin against light and grace, denying our profession, and quenching the blessed Spirit of God, we “crucify to ourselves the Son of God afresh, “and put Him to an open shame.” In all these ways we may all surely pray, “Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, Thou that art the God “of my health.”

“The God of my health.” We must not pass over this expression. “Health,” means ‘healing,’ just as “wealth” in our Prayer-book means ‘well-being’ or ‘welfare.’ It is God then who heals us—heals us from the wounds and

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sores of sin—heals us from the deadly gashes which the great enemy of souls inflicts upon us with his keen and poisoned weapons, gashes from which the life-blood is fast flowing forth. Well for us that the Good Samaritan will not pass by, like the Priest and Levite, on the other side. Well for us that there is One to bind up the wounds, and to pour in oil and wine, and to care for our every need. The newer Bible version has “salvation” in this place instead of “health”—“O God, Thou God of my salvation.” But in truth it is the same thing: for God’s healing is our only salvation. Without that healing we are lost. With it we are saved. Oh! may we ever seek the true Physician for the healing and safety of our souls! “They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.”

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We are sick indeed, brethren ; often sick unto death. May God make us to “know and feel that there is none other “Name under heaven given to man, in “whom, and through whom, we may “receive health and salvation, but only “the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

David says, “Deliver me from “blood-guiltiness, O God, Thou that “art the God of my health : and my “tongue shall sing of Thy righteous- “ness.” Mark what bursts of praise have been called forth by God’s mercies. Behold how those whose stricken frames were healed by Divine power forthwith glorified God. We read, for instance, how the lame man, healed by St. Peter at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, “entered with them “into the temple, walking and leaping, “and praising God.” But, if temporal mercies called forth such thankfulness

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and praise, how much more should spiritual mercies? If the healing of the body was the ground of such joyful gratitude, how much more the healing of the soul? We have need, indeed, to sing of God's righteousness—we who are partakers of that "righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all, and upon all them that believe," that "righteousness" which is "for the remission of sins that are past through the forbearance of God," that "righteousness" by which God can be "just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."

But even praise and thankfulness are the gift of God. "Thou shalt open my lips, O Lord: and my mouth shall show Thy praise." God must open the lips. God must prepare the heart. God must strike the rock of

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stone that the streams of praise may gush forth. And thus how very fitly do these words bear their place in our Church's services. "O Lord, open "Thou our lips. And our mouth shall "show forth Thy praise." Observe, brethren, where they are used. It is just after the Lord's Prayer. We have confessed our sins to the Lord, and humbly prayed for pardon. God's ambassador has delivered his message of pardon. And we have then, as forgiven and reconciled children, drawn nigh in the spirit of adoption, crying, "Abba, Father," summing our needs in His beloved Son's own perfect words of prayer. And we are about to rise from our knees and join in the praises of God. We are about to "set forth "His most worthy praise," and to sing of His righteousness. What prayer, then, could be found more fitting at

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such a time, than one beseeching Him, who only can, to open our lips that our mouth may show forth His praise? Perchance, my friends, if we sometimes uttered that little prayer—"O Lord, "open Thou our lips"—from our very hearts, with a true and earnest desire for its fulfilment, we might find the Psalms which follow less cold and wearisome than I fear we too often do. When God opens our lips, there will be no lack of warmth and life and fervour. But do we ask Him to open our lips? Did you ask Him to do so to-day? And, if not, can you expect to have the spirit of praise? How was it King David was empowered to pour forth such glorious floods of praise? Was it not simply because God opened his lips? Yea, God opened his heart and his lips; his heart was filled with praise, and out

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of the abundance of his heart his mouth spake. And very beautiful and very glorious are the songs of praise he sang. Let us listen to one brief utterance of his thankful heart. Perhaps some amongst us may echo his words in their own. "Praise the Lord, O
"my soul; and all that is within me
"praise His Holy Name. Praise the
"Lord, O my soul; and forget not
"all His benefits; who forgiveth all
"thy sins, and healeth all thine in-
"firmities; who saveth thy life from
"destruction, and crowneth thee with
"mercy and lovingkindness." "The
"Lord is full of compassion and mercy,
"long-suffering, and of great goodness.
"He will not alway be chiding; neither
"keepeth He His anger for ever. He
"hath not dealt with us after our sins;
"nor rewarded us according to our
"wickednesses. For look how high the

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“heaven is in comparison of the earth :
“so great is His mercy also toward
“them that fear Him. Look how wide
“also the east is from the west : so
“far hath He set our sins from us.
“Yea, like as a father pitieth his own
“children, even so is the Lord merciful
“unto them that fear Him.” “O praise
“the Lord, ye angels of His, ye that
“excel in strength, ye that fulfil His
“commandments, and hearken unto
“the voice of His words. O praise
“the Lord, all ye His hosts, ye servants
“of His that do His pleasure. O speak
“good of the Lord, all ye works of His,
“in all places of His dominion : praise
“thou the Lord, O my soul.”*

* Psalm ciii.

6.

Psalm li. 16, 17. (Prayer-book version.)

“For Thou desirest no sacrifice, else
“would I give it Thee: but Thou de-
“lightest not in burnt-offerings.

“The sacrifice of God is a troubled
“spirit: a broken and contrite heart,
“O God, shalt Thou not despise.”

GOD desireth no sacrifice: He delighteth not in burnt-offerings. This is a strange and startling saying. For it appears from very many places in Scripture that God *did* desire sacrifice, and *did* delight in burnt-offerings. There can, I think, be little doubt that sacrifice was, from the first, of Divine institution. It is hard to see how Abel's sacrifice could be more acceptable than Cain's, or what that 'faith,' which made it more acceptable,

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could be, unless God had in some way revealed His pleasure with respect to sacrifice.* It is also beyond question that, when God's servants in the times before the Law (as Noah and Abraham) offered sacrifices and burnt-offerings, they did so in full accordance with the will of God, and that their sacrifices and burnt-offerings were accepted by Him. It is plainer still when the Law came. For then sacrifices were most distinctly commanded by God Himself, and formed the principal part of the worship of His people. We cannot for a moment doubt that David himself faithfully observed all the sacrifices commanded in the Law. Nay, do we not read of his offering a burnt-offering at the threshing-floor of Araunah,

* See this point fully discussed in Magee on the Atonement, Discourse ii ; and in Jer. Taylor, Ductor Dubit : Book ii. c. iii. Rule 13, sec. 31.

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when God had sent a plague upon the land for his sin in numbering the people, so that "the Lord was intreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel"? And does he not, just after our text, in the last verse of this 51st Psalm, speak of God being pleased with the sacrifices and burnt-offerings and oblations offered to Him? And yet he says, "Thou desirest *no* sacrifice:" "Thou delightest *not* in burnt-offerings." How is this? Surely it is strange to hear an Israelitish monarch thus speak of sacrifice. And it is not in this place only that he does so. Mark how, in the 40th Psalm, speaking prophetically in the person of the Messiah, he writes,—"Sacrifice and meat-offering Thou wouldest not: but mine ears hast Thou opened. Burnt-offerings and sacrifice for sin hast Thou not re-

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“quired: then said I, Lo, I come,
“ (in the volume of the book it is
“ written of me,) that I should fulfil
“ Thy will, O my God: I am content
“ to do it; yea, Thy law is within my
“ heart.” And again, in the 50th
Psalm:—“Hear, O My people, and
“ I will speak: I Myself will testify
“ against thee, O Israel; for I am God,
“ even thy God. I will not reprove
“ thee because of thy sacrifices, or for
“ thy burnt-offerings; because they
“ were not alway before Me. I will
“ take no bullock out of thine house,
“ nor he-goat out of thy folds. For
“ all the beasts of the forest are Mine,
“ and so are the cattle upon a thousand
“ hills.” How are we to understand
such words, brethren? They speak
a wonderful language—wonderful in
its spirituality,—wonderful in its depth
and clearness of insight. For every

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one must feel how great a spiritual truth lies beneath the Psalmist's words. Every one, brought up, as we by God's mercy are, in the fuller knowledge of God revealed in Jesus Christ,—every Christian—must feel how worthless in God's sight are all outward observances compared with the inward spirit, which can alone give them worth and reality. And it is just this that King David would express. He needed not to learn that they that worship the Father “must worship Him *in Spirit and in truth.*” He knew that *in itself* all sacrifice was vain and of no account. He knew that “the blood of bulls and “of goats” could avail nothing towards the cleansing from sin. Guilty and sin-stained as he was, he trusted in no outward ordinance, in no ceremonial observance, for pardon and cleansing. Sacrifice and burnt-offering had a

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deeper significance for him. These were but outward emblems of mighty truths. He offered them indeed, for God had so ordained. And he would have offered more, had God required it. But God looked not at the outward emblem, but at the inward spirit. It was not the sacrifice which God regarded, but the heart of him who offered it. David might offer thousands of oxen, and tens of thousands of lambs, and be no nearer to pardon and renewal. And thus he exclaims:—"Thou desirest no sacrifice, else "would I give it Thee: but Thou "delightest not in burnt-offerings. "The sacrifice of God is a troubled "spirit: a broken and contrite heart, "O God, shalt Thou not despise."

This insight into the true value of sacrifice in God's eyes is not confined to David alone. It is brought out

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most clearly in many passages of the Old Testament. For instance, how strikingly does Samuel rebuke Saul, when he had broken God's commandment in sparing the best of the sheep and the oxen of the Amalekites to sacrifice unto the Lord, saying, "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." Solomon too writes in the Book of Proverbs, "To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice." And we have that very remarkable and instructive passage in the 1st chapter of Isaiah, in which God remonstrates with His rebellious people, telling them how hateful to Him were all their sacrifices and religious observances on account

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of their great wickedness:—"To what
"purpose is the multitude of your
"sacrifices unto Me? saith the Lord:
"I am full of the burnt-offerings of
"rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and
"I delight not in the blood of bullocks,
"or of lambs, or of he-goats." "Bring
"no more vain oblations; incense is an
"abomination unto Me; the new moons
"and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies,
"I cannot away with; it is iniquity,
"even the solemn meeting. Your new
"moons and your appointed feasts My
"soul hateth; they are a trouble unto
"Me; I am weary to bear them. And
"when ye spread forth your hands,
"I will hide Mine eyes from you: yea,
"when ye make many prayers, I will
"not hear: *your hands are full of*
"*blood.*" Once more, there are the
words spoken by the mouth of the
prophet Hosea, with which our blessed

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Lord twice rebukes the arrogant self-righteousness of the Pharisees:—"I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." All these passages speak the same truth with that which we are considering. All tell us that it is not the *actual* sacrifice, in *itself*, which God values; and that this is as nothing in God's sight compared with the state of heart in him who offers it.

But why then, it may be asked, was sacrifice instituted? If in itself it was so worthless,—if the spirit of the worshipper was of so much more importance than the offering he made,—why did God require such an offering at all? Why did He not simply desire the "broken and contrite heart"? Why did He not simply demand that men should "do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with their God"? Why were such full and precise com-

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mands given with regard to sacrifice ?
Why was so minute a ceremonial enjoined ?

One reason certainly was that there might be a form of outward expression for the inward feelings of the heart. This is the reason for all forms. Man is not satisfied without some mode of expressing what he feels in his heart. It is natural to him to do so. If he feels humble, he falls on his knees. If he feels grateful, he makes a thank-offering. God has so constituted him, joining together body and soul in one, that every inward emotion seeks to show itself by some outward sign. If we could separate the spirit from the body we might be able to do without forms, but, while they are joined together, forms are necessary to us. And thus God ordained sacrifice as an outward sign or form to express

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an inward feeling. This feeling was simply the feeling of *guilt*. When man fell, he felt that he was a guilty being; he had broken God's law, and he owed his life to God. And this God permitted him to express by means of sacrifice. He therein declared that his life was forfeited, and that death was the due punishment for his sins. So that sacrifice was a standing memorial of the death introduced by sin, and he that offered a sacrifice confessed, in the act, his guilt and unworthiness before God. Now, if this was one reason for the institution of sacrifice, namely, that it might be a mode of expressing the inward sense of guilt in the worshipper, it is quite plain that without such an inward sense of guilt, or, in other words, without a "broken and contrite heart," the sacrifice would be but an empty

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form, and, like all other empty forms, worse than worthless in God's sight.

And yet we can all see that this is not a sufficient account of the reason why sacrifice was ordained by God. There must be something beyond this to account for it. Some simpler way of expressing guilt and penitence would have sufficed, if that were all required.

We are bound to express these feelings. But we do not do so by means of sacrifice. We do so in confession and humiliation. And so we come to the greater and fuller reason for the institution of sacrifice. This reason is told us in the clearest possible way in the New Testament, but especially in the Epistle to the Hebrews. If on the one hand sacrifice was ordained as a standing memorial of the death introduced by sin, still more was it

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ordained as a standing memorial of that death which was to be suffered by the Redeemer.

When man fell, God at once gave the promise of recovery from the fall. Thenceforth all things pointed forward to that Seed of the woman, who should bruise the serpent's head. And, if Christ was "the end of the Law," and all the Law was "a schoolmaster to "bring us to Christ," most manifestly that which was the chief feature, the most marked and prominent part, of the Law, namely sacrifice, had a special reference to Him. We believe that animal sacrifice was ordained of God immediately after the fall. Why was it ordained except as a type or emblem of that one great Sacrifice, by which the curse of the fall was to be done away? Unquestionably all sacrifice was, from the first, "a sacramental

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“memorial, shewing forth the Lord’s
“death until He came.”*

If it be asked, How far did the patriarchs and holy men of old time understand this type?—how far did they recognise in the figure the great reality which was to come?—we must confess that this is a very difficult question to answer. Holy Scripture does not enable us to give a positive answer to it. There is nothing improbable in the notion that the significance of sacrifice, as foreshadowing a future Redemption by sacrifice, may have been in some degree made known from the beginning. If so, the *faith* of Abel, which rendered his sacrifice acceptable, is more easy to understand. But this much at least I think we may safely assume, namely, that animal sacrifice was commanded by God as

* See Magee on the Atonement, Discourse ii.

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a sign of faith in a promised Redemption, whether the nature and mode of that Redemption were revealed or no. The worshipper, who brought a sacrifice to God's altar, confessed, in the act, that he trusted in God's promise to redeem him in some way. It was as yet a mystery how this was to be effected. He would feel, if he was an enlightened spiritually-minded man, that his sacrifice was but a shadow, a type, an outward expression of a truth as yet hidden from his eyes. He would, like David, scorn the idea of God's actually taking delight in the slain beast, as the ignorant heathen believed their carnal gods to do. Yet he would offer it in faith:—partly indeed as a way of shewing forth his sense of guilt and penitence for sin; but yet more as a Divine ordinance which bore a deep, yet hidden, relation

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to the long promised Redemption, and which drew its real value in God's eyes from that relation. For I think there is nothing inconsistent with our most exalted ideas of God's nature in believing that, although sacrifice *in itself* could possess no value in His sight, yet as a type of the sacrifice of His own beloved Son it might bear such value, even though that typical resemblance might be hidden (in Divine wisdom) from the mind of the offerer.

From what has been said it follows that a Jewish sacrifice, in order to be acceptable to God, must have embraced these two ideas :—

1. It must have been the outward expression of true repentance.

- And 2, It must have been a type of the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The first of these conditions every

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devout Israelite would, like David, perfectly understand. The second he probably could not fully understand; although he might have, and probably was required to have, a faith in the connection of his sacrifice with a promised deliverance to be revealed in God's good time.

And now turn we once again to the Psalmist's words:—"Thou desirest no sacrifice, else would I give it Thee: but Thou delightest not in burnt-offerings." The *actual* sacrifice *for its own sake* God could not desire or delight in. But what then? "The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God, shalt Thou not despise." Yes, dear brethren, this is the sacrifice which God loveth—the offering of the broken and contrite heart. God despiseth "not the sighing of a contrite heart, nor the

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“desire of such as be sorrowful.” A spirit “troubled” with the sense of its deep guilt and utter sinfulness,—a heart “broken” with godly sorrow,—all its pride cast down and humbled in the dust, all its self-reliance gone,—“contrite,” worn down and crushed with shame and remorse,—this is the sacrifice the sinner must bring before his God; and this sacrifice is, in God’s sight, “more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.”

But another truth is revealed to *us*, which David only saw afar off. *He* knew that the outward sacrifice of slain beasts was nothing without the inward sacrifice of the penitent heart. *We* know that this inward sacrifice itself is nothing without the one true Sacrifice of the Blood of Jesus Christ. “By one offering hath He perfected “for ever them that are sanctified.”

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Dim shadows—hidden types—dark mysteries of the law—all are now unfolded. All find their meaning and their fulfilment in the Cross of Christ. What, then, is the “sacrifice of God”? Many a Jew of old would have answered, ‘The Lamb of the Passover, ‘the sin-offering of the great Day of ‘Atonement, the blood of bulls and of ‘goats offered upon the altar, these and ‘the like are the “sacrifices of God.”’ Yet some bare witness to deeper, more spiritual truths. David says, “The “sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit—“a broken and a contrite heart.” What shall *we* say? We say, the “sacrifice of God” is “the offering of “the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” We do not say that there are no other sacrifices. The sacrifices of the Law were true sacrifices. The sacrifice of the “broken and contrite heart” is a

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true sacrifice. The sacrifice of prayer and praise is a true sacrifice. The sacrifice of the will to the will of God is a true sacrifice. The sacrifice of worldly goods to God's honour and glory is a true sacrifice. The offering of ourselves, our souls and bodies, to God's service is a true sacrifice. The offering of whatsoever we offer to God is a true sacrifice. But all these have no value in themselves in God's sight apart from that one all-precious Sacrifice by which they are hallowed, and sanctified, and accepted.

And have we not yet one other spiritual sacrifice to offer, the most precious of all, because the closest bound with the one great Sacrifice of the Cross? Had the Jew his typical sacrifice, showing forth the Lord's death until he came, and have we no memorial rite, whereby we too may show

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forth His death until He come again? Yea, brethren, in the blessed Sacrament of the Body and Blood of our Redeemer we verily commemorate, and present to ourselves, and plead before God, that eternal Sacrifice, which was offered once for all, when Christ "through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God." If the sacrifice of the Jew was the type, the Sacrament of Christians is the memorial, of the death of Christ.* In it, we may truly say, Jesus Christ is "evidently set forth crucified among" us. Yes—it was dimly, obscurely, to the Jew. It is "*evidently*," clearly, to us. We see what prophets and kings desired to see, and saw not. We see the one all-prevailing Sacrifice of Jesus overshadowing, rather I should say,

* Those who desire to see this subject doctrinally discussed will find it admirably treated in Brown's Exposition of the Articles, Art. xxxi.

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illuminating,—embracing in its Divine fulness,—hallowing in its infinite perfections,—all other sacrifice. And that glorious Sacrifice we are permitted to represent, and recall, and offer in our pleadings before the mercy-seat, yea and in spirit to feed upon, in the holy rite which He—Himself the Priest and the Sacrifice—in His great love ordained. Let us praise God, my brethren, that we are not come to the dim types and dark shadows of the Law, but that “the light of the “glorious Gospel of Christ” hath shined upon us, and that we are come to “Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling “which speaketh better things than “that of Abel.” Abel’s sacrifice indeed was accepted through his faith. Our sacrifice is the Blood of the New Testament which was shed for us

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and for many for the remission of sins, even a "propitiation" "for the sins" "of the whole world."

The season is at hand when we shall be called upon to celebrate the offering of the great Sacrifice, "Christ our Pass-over" "sacrificed for us." Brethren, how are we preparing to do so? Shall He offer Himself for us, and shall we offer nothing to Him in return? Nay, what can we offer that we dare offer as a return for His offering of Himself? Could we give Him all we have, could we sacrifice every wish, every hope, every pleasure, every thought, yea our very lives, would that be a return for His sacrifice for us? And yet we would shew our thankfulness, and make proof of our love, by offering what we can. It is little enough. Yet God weighs the will rather than the deed. Then ask yourselves, brethren, what

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you have that you can offer. Is there no cherished sin, no unruly desire, no well-loved indulgence, which you could bring to the altar? These must go first. And then time,—and money,—and trouble,—can you give no more of these than you do at present to the service of your crucified Lord? And then prayers,—and fasting,—and self-denial,—and the services of God's House,—and the Sacrament of Christ's death,—can you not offer more of these than you do now? And then the “broken and contrite heart”—do you ever offer this? And, if not, will you not do so now? Can you gaze on that holy Form hanging for you on the “accursed tree”—the “Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief”—wounded for your transgressions and bruised for your iniquities—mangled, bleeding, dying, for you—can you go up and

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behold such a sight as this, and remain cold and hard-hearted still? And then *yourselves*—all offerings in one—body and soul—a living sacrifice unto the Lord—are you ready to offer this?

Brethren, ye are “an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices “acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” Oh! draw nigh with your offering. And let it be the best you have,—even *yourselves*. Offer not to the Lord of that which doth cost you nothing. Take the knife, and prepare the sacrifice. Cut away, with unsparing hand, all that unfits it to be offered. Cut away all your pride, and self-love, and sins, and lusts, and worldliness. Then come, unworthy though you still must be, come in humble trust in God’s mercy and love, come and lay the sacrifice upon the altar, and say:—
‘O Holy Father, I offer myself unto

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‘Thee. Alas ! it is a miserable, a most
‘unworthy, offering. Yet take it, O
‘Lord, for I have nothing else to offer.
‘Take it, and cleanse it, and make it
‘more worthy to be offered. Accept
‘it, not for its own value, for it deserves
‘only to be cast from Thy holy pre-
‘sence, but for the sake of that perfect
‘and all-sufficient Sacrifice, through
‘which alone I dare approach to offer
‘it, even the sacrifice of my Redeemer
‘and my God.’

7.

Psalm li. 18, 19. (Prayer-book version.)

**“O be favourable and gracious unto
“Sion: build Thou the walls of Jeru-
“salem.**

**“Then shalt Thou be pleased with the
“sacrifice of righteousness, with the
“burnt-offerings and oblations: then
“shall they offer young bullocks upon
“Thine altar.”**

MANY a glorious vision had built itself up before the dreaming eye of the prophet-king, as he thought upon the destinies of the land which he ruled and of the city which he loved. It was the longing desire of his heart to make the city of Jerusalem worthy, in its strength and grandeur, to be the royal city,—the seat of kingdom,—the centre of unity to his people. But more than this; it was his earnest wish

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to make it also the city of God,—an holy city,—the centre of worship to his people. And much he was allowed to do towards the fulfilment of his desires, but not all. His own royal palace was built upon Mount Zion, that holy hill, which, as being the chief and most eminent part of the city, is so constantly put for the whole. There, too, David brought the ark of God from among the Philistines. And the towers were set up, and the walls were strengthened. But when the King, after bringing the ark in triumph to the holy city, wished to carry out his purpose, and to build a worthy temple for the worship of the Lord,—when, contrasting the magnificence of his own dwelling-place with the poverty of the tabernacle in which the ark of God rested, he said unto Nathan, “See now, I dwell in an house of cedar,

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"But the ark of God dwelleth within
"curtains,"—then a stop was put to
his designs. That work was not for
him to do. God had other work for
him. He had wars to fight for the
Lord, and enemies of the Lord to
conquer. But his son Solomon was
to be a man of peace; and in his day
was that superb temple to rise up,
which David told him, ere he died, was
to be "exceeding magnifical, of fame
"and of glory throughout all countries."
But, though David was not allowed
to build the house of the Lord, he was
allowed to prepare all things needful
for the building,—the gold and the
silver and the stones and the wood
and the iron and the brass. Moreover
he was specially inspired to direct the
plan and the pattern of the work; so
that, as he mused in his cedar palace on
Mount Zion, he was able to call up

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before his mind's eye the glory ~~and~~
~~beauty of that marvellous~~ building
 which in his son's days was to crown
 with its magnificence the neighbouring
 height of Moriah. He saw in his
 visions Jerusalem "built as a city that
 "is at unity in itself," with the hills
 standing round about it, even as the
 Lord "standeth round about His
 "people." And there was the hill of
 Sion, "a fair place, and the joy of the
 "whole earth." And the Lord had
 "chosen Sion to be an habitation for
 "Himself," He had "longed for her,"
 He had said "This shall be My rest for
 "ever; here will I dwell, for I have
 "a delight therein." It was the hill of
 Sion, which God "loved; and there He
 "built His temple on high." "At
 "Salem was His tabernacle, and His
 "dwelling at Sion." Aye, and the
 royal seer saw the glory of the Lord

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resting on His holy hill, a light and a splendour, not of earth, shining round about it, rays of divine blessing shed forth from it upon all the land, help sent forth from the sanctuary, and strength and salvation out of Sion. And he saw the people too streaming up to the holy worship. There, evermore, over the gilded walls and pinacles of the sanctuary, ascended up the column of smoke from the altar of sacrifice, and the steaming incense, with the prayers and the praises of the people. And thither, evermore, went up the tribes of the Lord, to praise the Lord which dwelt in Sion, to "worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." And when he saw these happy visions, David praised God, and sang of the glorious city and the holy hill. "Walk about Sion, and go round about her, and tell the towers thereof."

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“Her foundations are upon the holy hills; the Lord loveth the gates of Sion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Very excellent things are spoken of thee, thou city of God.” “The Lord is great in Sion.” “Out of Sion hath God appeared in perfect beauty.” And “there the Lord promised His blessing, and life for evermore.”

Thus doubtless had the Psalmist often felt and often sung. But now his heart is bowed down with grief; his thoughts are busy with the record of his sin; his mouth is filled with confession and lowly words of penitence. Is it a time to forget the shame and sorrow, and to call up again the old visions of gladness? Nay, not for that. And yet can he forget Jerusalem, in sadness or in mirth? What saith he? “If I forget thee, O Jeru-

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“salem, let my right hand forget her
“cunning.” And his last words have
linked on the old theme even to the
strain of mourning. For he has spoken
of sacrifice. True, it was but to say
that God desired not burnt-offerings
to cleanse the sinner from his sin;
it was but to tell what was the true
spiritual sacrifice which the sinner could
offer, and which God would accept.
Yet how can he even name sacrifice,
and not think at once of that which
was ever the interest closest folded to
his heart, the worship of Sion,—the
glory of Jerusalem? Perhaps his sin
may have deserved the failure of his
dearest projects. Perhaps God may
visit it upon the city which He had
built up, and the holy hill where He
had set His King. Perhaps He may,
in His righteous anger, withdraw His
presence from His dwelling-place, and

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His blessing from the gates of the daughter of Sion. But he will pray for it. He will pray:—"Think upon "the tribe of Thine inheritance, and "Mount Sion wherein Thou hast dwelt." "O be favourable and gracious unto "Sion; build Thou the walls of Jerusalem." Yes, for he feels that this work is not for the praise of man, but for the glory of God. He feels that in its accomplishment God's name will be exalted. He feels that, when God shall "arise and have mercy "upon Sion," "when the Lord shall "build up Sion, and when His glory "shall appear," when the city which He has chosen and the hill which He has loved shall be made meet to be the place where He shall set His Name, and where His honour dwelleth, then will the sacrifice and offering go up more acceptably before His

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throne, then will He be “pleased with
“the sacrifice of righteousness, with
“the burnt-offerings and oblations.”

But why? Was it so necessary that God should be worshipped in splendour and magnificence? Does He care for marble pillars and carved stonework, for hangings of purple or overlayings with gold? Nay, is He not a Spirit? And must not they that worship Him worship Him in spirit and in truth? And is there not a deep and awful danger in all this external magnificence—a danger infinitely greater to the Jew than to us,* yet not without its snare for us,—the danger, I mean, of falling into a sensual worship, that is, of allowing the senses to affect us in our worship more than the heart and spirit within? Certainly, “God, that made
“the world and all things therein,

* See Ruskin's Seven Lamps. Sacrifice, Sect. vi.

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“ seeing that He is Lord of heaven
“ and earth, dwelleth not in temples
“ made with hands; neither is wor-
“ shipped with men's hands, as though
“ He needed anything.” And yet He
—the same God, who cannot change—
Himself ordered and demanded the
sumptuous worship and elaborate cere-
monial of the Tabernacle and the Tem-
ple. How was this? No doubt in part
because God taught His people of old
in types and figures; and that this was
so with regard to the rites and ceremon-
ies of the Jewish worship the Epistle to
the Hebrews teaches us very plainly.
No doubt also there were reasons
arising out of the state and circum-
stances of the Jewish people; for it is
obvious that the appointment of one
great centre of worship at Jerusalem
was the best mode both of preserving
unity, and of maintaining a knowledge

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of God's law. Still, as I said, God is the same, and cannot change. What pleased God of old must please Him still. And I cannot doubt that one truth which we may gather from the grand and costly nature of God's worship under the old covenant is that which David himself teaches us, when, on the very spot where afterwards arose that splendid temple which he longed and prepared to build, he declared, I will not "offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing." Local religion is no more. We know that God is worshipped as acceptably in one place as in another. We know that the faltering prayer which goes up from the poor man's humble cottage is as precious in God's sight as that which ascends in the burst of glorious harmony from the noblest cathedral of the land. Yet side

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by side with this truth must be set this other, (for it is no less true,) namely, that whatsoever we offer to the Lord, it must be the best we can offer, and must be offered freely and ungrudgingly, in the spirit of sacrifice and of thankful love.

But we have stayed our steps too long among the courts of the Lord's house in Jerusalem, like curious travellers tracing out the dim outlines of the ruined walls, and calling back from the dead that which has been, but shall not be again.

Let us pass on to other thoughts. It may be that David, in speaking in our text of Sion and Jerusalem, meant rather to speak of the *people* than of the material buildings. It may be he rather prayed that God would "be favourable and gracious" to His chosen people, that He would bless

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and stablish and unite them: believing that then their sacrifices and offerings would be more acceptable to Him. If so, we learn how well it is to pray ever "Give peace in our time, O Lord." For does not all experience, as well as all reason, teach us that times of war and discord and faction and strife are not times when religion prospers and God's worship is cared for? Oh! if it be only that holiness may abound, and good works may not languish in the land, let us pray God to be "favourable and gracious" to our nation, and to build us up in peace and righteousness.

But let us take the veil away. Let us break the shell, and take out the kernel. We will no more talk of the ancient Zion and of the city of the Jews. We will come to the spiritual Zion and to the new Jerusalem. Shall

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I tell you that Zion and Jerusalem are types of the Church of Christ? Nay, brethren, can we read prophet's vision, or psalmist's song, and fail to perceive that we are reading of something far more great and glorious than the literal places of which they speak so much? They speak indeed of the Church of Christ; but they speak of even more. For God's truths are as mighty circles one within the other. Here and there we pierce the clouds and see how the circles answer each to each. It is so with the words of which we are speaking now. They come from the centre of all truth, even the Spirit of God. And the inmost circle is the first, and, as we often call it, the literal meaning of the words uttered—the visible Sion and Jerusalem of old. But the words pass on, and straightway they come to another wider circle. And this is

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the Church of the living God, the spiritual Zion, with the children that are born in her. And once more the words flow on, and meet afar off with another greater circle, where they find their fullest truest meaning; but this is dimly and faintly seen by mortal eye, for it is in the heavenly Canaan, "the land that is very far off."

It is well to look backward and to look forward. It is best to think most of that which we are now. And are we not children of the spiritual Zion? Have we not a citizenship in "the city of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel"? If the "glorious things," which were spoken of the city of God of old, had their first and narrowest meaning in the splendour and beauty of Jerusalem below,—if they shall have their last and widest meaning in that "city which hath

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“foundations, whose builder and maker
“is God,”—have they not a very full
and precious meaning as spoken of that
present “kingdom of heaven,” which
God hath set up in this world? God
chose the seed of Abraham to be His
own peculiar people of old. Now *we*
are His chosen and elect people, “a
“chosen generation, a royal priesthood,
“an holy nation, a peculiar people;
“that we should show forth the praises
“of Him who hath called us out of
“darkness into His marvellous light.”
Of His great grace God hath “trans-
“lated us into the kingdom of His
“dear Son.” We are “come unto
“Mount Sion, and unto the city of
“the living God, the heavenly Jeru-
“salem.” O children of Sion, citizens
of the heavenly Jerusalem, called into
God’s glorious kingdom, elected into
His chosen generation, how little do ye

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think of the blessedness of your calling !
Are these light and empty privileges ?
Are they mere sounding words which
have no reality ? God forbid. And
yet how little do we realise them !
When we think of religion, we think
of ourselves in our relation to God.
So far well. This must, of course, come
first. But do we think of ourselves
also in our relation one to another ?
Do we think of ourselves *as a Church*,
as one body in Christ, and “every one
“members one of another” ? Do we
feel and own that we have a bond
of fellowship which draws us very
closely to each other, and which we
dare not rend or weaken ? I am sure
a great many persons who think much
of their religion as regards their duty
to God, think very little, and very
imperfectly, of it as regards their duty
to man. And why is this, except that

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they forget that God has set up a Church and kingdom upon earth, into which He has, of His free grace, called us, that we may be bound each to each with bonds of brotherhood and unity and love? Perhaps, if we thought more of this,—if we were less selfish, and more loving and brotherly,—in our religion, there would be fewer strifes and divisions amongst us. And may we not then pray for our Zion, as David prayed for his? May we not say, “O be favourable and gracious unto Sion: build Thou the walls of Jerusalem.” Yea, Lord, “look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities.” “Arise, and have mercy upon Sion; for it is time that Thou have mercy upon her, yea, the time is come.” ‘Look, O Lord, upon the Church of Thy redeemed. Heal her rents and divisions. Build her up in the strength

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‘of faith and the beauty of love.’ Surely, every loyal son of Zion will thus pray for her. And then,—when God hath heard and answered this the prayer of her children,—when the Lord hath “turned again the captivity “of Sion,”—when He hath looked down from heaven, and beheld, and visited this vine,—then shall He be “pleased “with the sacrifice of righteousness.” Aye, who can doubt that, if we, as a Church, were more holy, more consistent, more united,—if our Jerusalem were “built as a city that is at unity in “itself,”—if we worshipped the Lord with an holy worship, with one mind and one mouth glorifying His Name,—who can doubt, I say, that our prayers and praises, our sacrifices of righteousness, would ascend up before the Lord far far more acceptably than they do now? When our divisions prove still

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how "carnal" we are, and on all sides "there are that separate themselves," when our worship is broken and dis-united, and our faith is corrupted by many fashions of false doctrine, how can we deem that the God of unity and truth can look with favour upon our Church in this land? Our great Easter Feast is nigh at hand. But what shall we see then? Not that which God would love to look upon, I fear. The tribes of old went up in vast companies, as one man, to keep the great Passover Feast at Jerusalem. They asked "the way to Zion, with "their faces thitherward, saying, Come "and let us join ourselves to the Lord "in a perpetual covenant that shall not "be forgotten." Will this glorious sight be seen with us? Shall we all go up to our Paschal Feast as one man, all with our faces the same way, all

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kneeling as brothers side by side at the holy Feast, all eager to own our common brotherhood in Christ, all longing to join ourselves to the Lord and to one another “in a perpetual “covenant that shall not be forgotten”? Ah! brethren, is it not rather, one one way, and one another, one to this place of worship and one to that, and some—perchance many—to none at all? Where is that beautiful unity,—unity of heart and of body, of spirit and of form,—seen in prophets’ visions, shadowed in ancient types, enjoined in Apostolic command? When shall the elect Church of Christ in our beloved land realise that which we believe it is God’s will she should realise, and which our sins and unfaithfulness have so long hindered her from realising,—when shall she become, like her type of old, “a fair place, and

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“the joy of the whole earth”? When shall she be worthy that God should at length appear in her “in perfect beauty”? Now alas! God’s Zion is lying low in her humiliation. Her hedges are broken down. The enemy casteth down her walls, and entereth her strongholds. She is still the city of God, but the city mourneth. “Zion spreadeth forth her hands, and “there is none to comfort her.” Is there none? Nay, faithless heart, wherefore dost thou doubt thy God? For “the Lord shall yet comfort Zion.” Yes, “the Lord shall comfort Zion; joy “and gladness shall be found therein, “thanksgiving, and the voice of “melody.” And “the redeemed of “the Lord shall return and come to “Zion with songs and everlasting joy “upon their heads; they shall obtain “joy and gladness, and sorrow and

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“sighing shall flee away.” “They shall
“come and sing in the height of Zion ;
“and shall flow together to the good-
“ness of the Lord.” O God, hasten
this blessed day ! It may be there are
even now signs of its approaching
advent. Surely even now in many
ways, we see God “favourable and
“gracious unto Sion,” and building the
walls of our Jerusalem. Let us hope.
There is life and zeal abroad in the
land—not what should be—but we
may thank God, and take courage.
God’s House is lifting her head from
her ruins. God’s ministry is growing
in faith and earnestness. God’s people
are, we humbly believe, multiplied.
It is but a beginning—yet does it
not prove that which is all in all ?
Yes, when we see these things, we
verily echo the old words of hope:—
“Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of

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“Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.” “Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion: put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city.” “So shall ye know that I am the Lord your God dwelling in Zion my holy mountain.”

But if we hope, brethren, let us pray. “Oh! pray for the peace of Jerusalem.” Pray for the holiness and unity of our Zion. Why should we not each of us who love our Church, and who would see peace within her walls,—why should we not resolve to offer up daily some such short prayer as this:—‘O Thou, who didst say unto Thy disciples “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you,” regard not our sins, but have mercy upon Thy Church, and grant unto her such peace and unity as shall

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‘seem expedient unto Thee, who livest
‘and reignest for ever—Amen’? We
do not pray enough for this blessing,
and so it is withheld. Oh! may God
“take away” from among us “all
“hatred and prejudice, and whatsoever
“else may hinder us from godly union
“and concord; that, as there is but one
“Body, and one Spirit, and one Hope
“of our calling, one Lord, one Faith,
“one Baptism, one God and Father
“of us all, so we may be all of one
“heart, and of one soul, united in one
“holy bond of Truth and Peace, of
“Faith and Charity, and may with
“one mind and one mouth glorify
“Him; through Jesus Christ our
“Lord.” Oh! if this were so indeed,
how blest would be all our prayers,
how beautiful all our worship! . If so
great a blessing is promised to the
united prayer of only two or three,

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what if a whole nation's prayers went up to heaven as the voice of one man ! Then indeed should we see peace upon the Israel of God. Then "the Lord from out of Sion should so bless us that we should see Jerusalem in prosperity all our life long." Then would God be "pleased with the sacrifice of righteousness,"—pleased with all prayers and praises, all thanksgivings and holy solemnities,—pleased with the "burnt-offering" of a heart purified in the fire of affliction, of a faith tried, like gold, in the furnace;—pleased with every "oblation" brought before Him by a loving and united people,—with the offering of all gifts of time and talents and wealth and work;—and then should we offer—not "young bullocks" upon His altar—but offer a better and more acceptable offering, even *ourselves*, with all we

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have and are, to be His for ever
through Jesus Christ,—His below and
His above—His in the Holy Zion of
His Church for a little while on earth,
His in the glorious Zion of His Church
for ever in heaven !

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